

MARCH 1, 2004

IN THESE TIMES

KURT VONNEGUT TALKS TO KILGORE TROUT • 18

OIL AND DEMOCRACY DON'T MIX • 6

BUSH'S FAITH-BASED HOMOPHOBE • 11

DOCS SHINE AT SUNDANCE • 26



Studs Terkel • Greg Palast •

Naomi Klein • Jesse Jackson Jr. •

David Kusnet • Sandra Steingraber

The State of the Asylum

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Rebutting Bush

Decoding Dubya By David Kusnet

16 Deceptive as ever; more pedestrian than usual.

State of the Asylum By Kurt Vonnegut

18 A conversation with out-of-print science fiction writer Kilgore Trout.

Devil in the Details By Naomi Klein

19 America's idea of Iraqi governance is an appointocracy.

Buy in Now, Pay Later By Dean Baker

20 Our current economic policy is about a Five-Second Plan.

Second-Class Citizens By Juan Gonzalez

20 Bush's immigration initiative reinstates the Bracero Program.

Ghost Writer By Studs Terkel

21 Bush's State of the Union was channeling an old comedic master.

Education Eugenics By Greg Palast

22 No Child Left Behind kicks ass; our child's, that is.

False Crusader By Jim Wallis

23 Faith can't keep up with the nation's spiraling poverty rates.

Weapons of Mass Distraction

By Jesse Jackson, Jr.

23 Bush can obfuscate, but he can't hide the real problems facing America.

Locker Room Politics By Susan J. Douglas

24 Women of America, beware of Bush's frat-boy attitude.

Two Little Words By Sandra Steingraber

24 That's all our environment rated in Bush's State of the Union.

The Texas Testing Massacre

By Bill Ayers

25 Nationwide testing is less diagnosis than autopsy.

Contents

Volume 28 - Number 7

6 Oil and Democracy Don't Mix

By Frida Berrigan

Bush administration policies ensure the oil keeps flowing, no matter what the human cost.

9 U.S. vs. Them By Jeff Conant

The World Social Forum takes aim at empire.

9 Appall-o-Meter By Dave Mulcahey

10 Re-United Nations By Ian Williams

U.S. admits U.N. role necessary for laying electoral groundwork in Iraq.

11 Bush's Sheldon Game

By Hans Johnson

The White House's in-house, faith based homophobe.

12 Power Pop By Ana Marie Cox

Gilding the Donald.

13 The Third Coast

By Salim Muwakkil

Reparations suits leave opening.

27 Art Space Sidewalk art.

32 Backpage Bush by the numbers.



FEATURES

Democrats Vie for Star Slot By David Moberg

14 Why John Kerry and his "electability" fail to send shivers of excitement down our progressive spines.

CULTURE

26 • Sundance 2004 By Pat Aufderheide

The docs rock at this year's film festival in Utah.

28 • Outside the Mainstream

By Don Thrasher

Free your mind and CDs will follow.

29 • Pan-tastic By James Parker

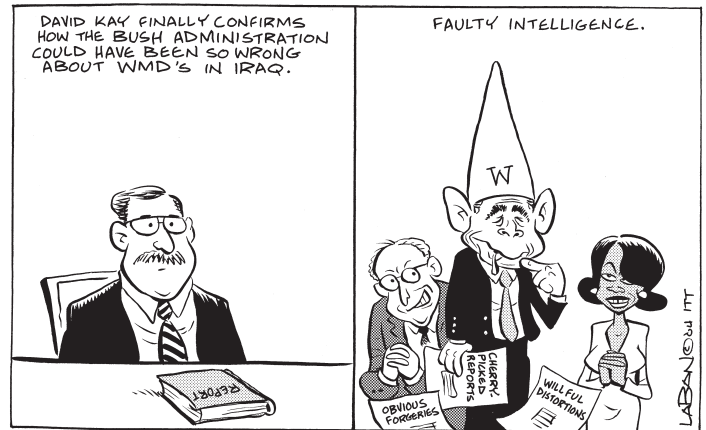
Audiences have overlooked a magically faithful adaptation of J.M. Barrie's classic.

Cover illustration by Brian Paisley / brianpaisley@yahoo.com

“My country, right or wrong’
is a thing no patriot would
ever think of saying
except in a desperate case.
It is like saying, ‘My mother,
drunk or sober.’”

G.K. CHESTERTON
THE DEFENDENT (1901)

Editorial



Fear Monger in Chief

By Joel Bleifuss

In his State of the Union address, President George W. Bush played to people’s fears to rally the nation. ¶ Fears Americans have for their

physical safety: “The terrorists continue to plot against America and the civilized world. ... training and plotting in other nations and drawing up more ambitious plans.”

Fears about economic security: “The tax reductions [Congress] passed are set to expire. ... The unfair tax on marriage will go back up. ... Millions of families will be charged \$300 more in federal taxes for every child. ... Americans face a tax increase.”

Fears parents have for their children: “Each year, about 3 million teenagers contract sexually transmitted diseases that can harm them or kill them.”

And fears of gays: “Activist judges ... have been redefining marriage. ... Our nation must defend the sanctity of marriage.”

Afraid of appearing partisan, the media criticized only Bush’s delivery—not the substance of his speech. But in failing to call a spade a spade, a fool a fool, a dangerous demagogue a threat to America’s future, the mainstream media left it up to others who command an audience to do so.

Receiving her award for *Angels in America* at the Golden Globes ceremony, Meryl Streep admonished the president, “I don’t think that our two biggest problems in America are that too many people want to commit their lives together ’til death do us

part and steroids in sports.”

The Academy Awards will create another opportunity for the entertainers who provide the “roses” that enrich our lives to remind our leaders that people need “bread” to make life livable.

Last year, Los Angeles-based Global Vision for Peace convinced more than 30 film artists—including Streep, Adrien Brody, Daniel Day-Lewis, Martin Scorsese, Susan Sarandon, Anjelica Huston and Brendan Fraser—to wear a Dove of Peace pin. This year, Global Vision for Peace has partnered with the United Nations, launching Artists for the U.N.

The group’s first initiative, endorsed by five Nobel Peace Prize laureates, is to organize this year’s Oscar luminaries to put on the same pin to promote world peace and the United Nations.

Given the dearth of honest critiques, Hollywood progressives have a rare opportunity to showcase real U.S. values to 37 million Americans and millions more in 100-plus countries. Yes, they run the danger of being partisan. To be partisan is to be criticized. Partisanship is a dirty

word. It indicates that there is conflict, that not everyone is happy, that rebellion has a voice. That Bush’s State of the Union is *not* the state of our union.

Recall last year’s Academy Awards, when ceremony director Louis Horvitz, yelling “Music! Music!” had the orchestra drown out Michael Moore. Moore used his Oscar acceptance speech to tell the shameful truth about our nation’s president.

We live in a time when we have fictitious election results that elect a fictitious president. We live in a time where we have a man sending us to war for fictitious reasons.

This year, Bush said to *all* of us, we “must work together to counter the negative influence of the culture.” To which we

Partisanship is a dirty word. It indicates that rebellion has a voice.

respond: *All* of us must work together to counter the negative influence of Bush.

Using the State of the Union for this type of fear mongering demands from us more than muted dissent. It compels all of us to act. Because Bush is right on one point: If somebody attacks, you don’t just stand by, particularly if it is a militarized oligarchy that clings to power by stoking public fears and appealing to baser instincts. ■

Letters



One Hand Clapping

In his article, "A Merry Marxy Christmas" (January 19), Eugene McCarraher writes that "Žižek affirms Christian orthodoxy against ... New Age beliefs (exemplified in Buddhism)" and later that he designates Buddhism as "the paradigmatic ideology of late capitalism' enabling its devotees to participate in market competition while effecting the appearance of serenity." Then, enigmatically, he inserts that "Žižek sees no distinction between Western and Asian Buddhism here, noting that the origins of 'corporate Zen' lie in Japanese military and managerial ideology."

I would suggest that McCarraher and, it seems from his article, Žižek, do not know very much about Buddhism. I'm sure that if McCarraher or Žižek actually

thought about "compassion" they would realize, as many Buddhists do, that it clearly implies "action" just as much as the seldom fully demonstrated, "love thy neighbor as thyself." I keep going back to the words of Joseph Campbell that my husband quoted to me (via Kurt Vonnegut's *Timequake*): "We are here to help each other get through this thing, whatever it is." Maybe we should just get on with it.

Jean Vogrin
Warren Grove, New Jersey

Solidarity with Whom?

Readers of Shirin Ebadi's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in Oslo will have noted that she does not denounce the Western left for its lack of soli-

arity with various dissident movements afoot within Iran today ("The Selective Solidarity of the Left," December 22). Instead, Ebadi focuses on the West's hypocrisy and double standards on questions of human rights and tries to show that the demonization of Islam, along with variations of the "clash of civilizations" ideology, is dangerous and mistaken. Ebadi understands quite well that the crucial matter at hand, about which the world needs to be warned, is the imminent threat of a U.S. and/or Israeli military attack on Iran, whatever the pretext.

Instead of Shirin Ebadi's speech, *In These Times* offers its readers a denunciation of the Western left for its alleged lack of solidarity with Iranian dissident movements, via the not-very-subtle work of anti-left enforcer Danny Postel.

Now, in the pages of the "left" *In These Times*, Postel plays the leftist, denouncing Bush and Wolfowitz, while pretending to worry about left weakness in failing to support Iranian dissidents. You will look in vain for any Postel writing focusing on the threat of U.S. aggression against Iran, presumably a less important topic than left integrity! How smoothly he now glosses over the fact that dissident Iranians are not being butchered or ethnically cleansed on a large scale; over the fact that campaigning

for those dissidents feeds into U.S. policy needs by denigrating the Iranian state; and that expressions of solidarity would hardly be useful to any Iranian cause, although possibly helpful to Wolfowitz and Bush. How well Postel evades the consideration that solidarity efforts are likely to be most useful when they might affect U.S. policy in a proper direction, as in terminating support of a U.S. sponsored regime of butchers, in contrast with helping forward a U.S. program of destabilization and invasion.

Edward S. Herman
Penn Valley, Pennsylvania

Get Back On the Road

Craig Aaron's column on Howard Dean ("Take Bush Home, Country Roads," January 5) is not the first time *In These Times* published an apparent endorsement of Dean. I find this distressing in a publication that touts itself as progressive. The article's pull-out quote reads, "The Democrats need a nominee who can appeal to the angry left." Well this is one angry leftist who's not ready to jump on the Dean bandwagon. Dean claims to support "universal" health care, yet falls short of endorsing single payer. He is opposed to the war on Iraq, but is not so clear about the occupation of it. And most important to progressives, environmentalists, working people, human rights advocates and small-d democrats everywhere: Dean does not oppose NAFTA, the WTO or the proposed FTAA.

This is the time for us to vote our conscience, to pick on the basis of positions and sub-

www.inthesetimes.com

DISCUSSION

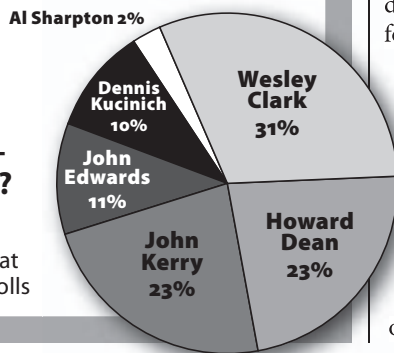
"Having failed to adequately police the bad doctors in the ranks, the medical profession then complains about expensive malpractice insurance. It falls to the civil courts to do the policing."

Want to join the debate? Visit the forums on *Devil's Advocate*, By Craig Aaron on our Web site.

POLL

MOST RECENT Which Democrat has the best chance of beating George W. Bush?

Cast your vote or discuss at www.inthesetimes.com/polls



stance. Dennis Kucinich has taken the right position on every progressive issue. In the interest of bringing these issues before the American public next summer at the convention, it is time for *In These Times* to publicize this fact.

Joel Hildebrandt
Berkeley, California

Cry Contradiction

Kevin Kim stumbles all over himself trying to present a balanced viewpoint in "Cry Haiti" (January 5). After spending most of the article quoting Haitian opposition and U.S. State Department officials who subtly blame Aristide for how bad the situation is, he actually hits the nail on the head when he writes, "Unlike Aristide, the opposition lacks popular support and seems more bent on ousting Aristide and destabilizing Haiti than reaching any electoral compromise."

Kim talks about "long-delayed" elections, but fails to say who is delaying them or why—a key to understanding the situation in Haiti. Simply put, the "intransigent opposition—partly composed of former authoritarian [read Duvalierist] and elitist [read ruling class] elements with disturbing ties to the International Republican Institute, a D.C.-based advocacy group influential in Bush administration circles" is preventing the elections by refusing to appoint any members to the Provi-



Introducing Our New Design

With this issue, *In These Times* readers will notice a dramatic overhaul of our visual look. We had ambitious goals going into the process several months ago—all geared towards making our content more accessible to a wider audience.

To that end we have evaluated the pace of the magazine, refreshed our logo, chosen complimentary typefaces and taken every opportunity to make our content more reader friendly. We look forward to your feedback. Let us know what you think. Email us at: art@inthesetimes.com.

—Jim Rinnert, Seamus Holman

sional Electoral Council, which oversees elections, because they know they will lose. No electoral council, no elections.

The State Department is far from an unbiased observer in Haiti. Since the election of President Aristide in 2000, the U.S. government has spent millions to bankroll an opposition with little popular support and has enforced an economic aid embargo intended to starve Haiti. A signed loan from the Inter-American Development Bank still has not been distributed, and the World Bank and IMF have cut off all loans, making it even more difficult for the Haitian government to finance health, education and develop-

ment projects.

We have seen this pattern before—in Jamaica, in Chile, in Nicaragua and currently in Venezuela. An international media campaign designed to tarnish and discredit the Aristide government forms a significant aspect of this destabilization campaign. With "Cry Haiti" *In These Times* has jumped into the fray, giving credibility to the Haitian elite and the Bush administration and discounting the role of the millions of poor Haitians who support their president. Is that really where you want to be?

Charlie Hinton
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An Iraqi man covers his face as smoke rises from a blast at a key oil pipeline in the northern Iraqi town of Baiji.

MARWAN NAAMANI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Oil and Democracy Don't Mix

Bush administration policies guarantee a constant flow, no matter what the human cost. *By Frida Berrigan*

AT A 1996 energy conference in New Orleans, Dick Cheney, then CEO of Halliburton said, "The problem is that the good Lord didn't see fit to put oil and gas reserves where there are democratic governments."

Laying the blame on the divine is a stretch, but it seems that the vice president is right: democracy and oil do not mix. Just look at the United States' top 10 oil suppliers. Algeria, Angola, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia are repressive regimes with deplorable human rights records. Mexico and Venezuela, while democracies, are marked by instability, inequality and civil strife. Iraq remains at war and under occupation. Only Norway, Canada and the United Kingdom are fully functioning democracies.

Why don't oil and democracy mix? At least part of the answer can be found in Washington's policy of providing military aid and training to leaders who guaran-

tee an uninterrupted flow of oil, defending it against all threats—even those coming from their own citizens.

Since the beginning of the war on terrorism in 2001, the United States' top 10 sources of oil imports have experienced a 350 percent increase in U.S. military aid and training. In 2003, the United States plans to provide these countries with \$58 million in military assistance. In fiscal year 2001, their military assistance totaled \$12.2 million.

A large part of the increase is explained by Washington's rewarding of regimes like Algeria and Nigeria for their ability to cloak domestic repression in the rhetoric of the "war on terrorism." As the United States looks ahead to a never ending war on terrorism and growing dependence on foreign oil, this dynamic will become increasingly common.

Africa accounts for 16 percent of U.S. oil imports,

and the National Intelligence Council predicts an increase to 25 percent by 2015. Hunger for this oil, combined with the need to collect allies in the war on terrorism, led the Bush administration to adopt a "see no evil" position toward human rights problems and inequality in the continent's oil-rich nations.

This policy is so entrenched that William Burns, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and North African affairs, remarked with admiration while on a 2002 trip there, "Washington has much to learn from Algeria on ways to fight terrorism." Burns must not have read his own State Department 2002 Human Rights Report, which notes that Algerian "security forces committed extra-judicial killings, tortured, beat or otherwise abused detainees." Algeria has proven oil reserves of more than 9.2 billion barrels and is considered underdeveloped in terms of production, representing a golden opportunity for U.S. companies.

And so, in spite of persistent human rights abuses, relations between Washington and Algiers are warming. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has visited the White House twice and officials are discussing establishment of an American military base in Algeria. Emboldened by this, Algerian generals are pushing for access to previously denied lethal technology like combat aircraft.

Nigeria is the fifth largest exporter of oil to the United States, and with the discovery of new deep-water oil reserves right off the coast U.S. strategic interest is growing.

In July 2003, as President Bush departed for Africa, Gen. James Jones, the U.S. commander responsible for African operations, announced that Washington was negotiating long-term use of a "family" of military bases across Africa and predicted a much bigger role for U.S. military in the Gulf of Guinea, right off the Nigerian coast.

Washington's desire for Nigerian oil and territory triggered deeper military relationships. During the reign of Gen. Sani Abacha military ties were frozen. But since his death in 1999, the thaw has been quick. That year, Nigeria purchased \$74,000 in U.S. weaponry. By 2001, the United States delivered thousands of times that—a total of \$3.1 million. Military aid also skyrocketed, from \$90,000 in 1999 to more than \$4 million for 2003.

How increased military aid will improve human rights and efforts toward democratization is unclear. The State Department's Human Rights Report found that the Nigerian "military and security forces commit-

ted extrajudicial killings."

Military aid is also increasing in areas that do not supply the United States with oil—yet. The seven countries that make up the Caspian region—Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—are rich in oil, but the West is still trying to figure out how to extract and transport it. In the meantime, the region became strategically important for other reasons—its proximity to Afghanistan and its eagerness to aid in the war on terrorism.

Uzbekistan granted the U.S. permission to establish a "semi-permanent" military base in its territory, other countries offered "fly-over rights," troops, intelligence and rhetorical support for the war on terrorism. In exchange, the handful of dictators, generals and presidents-for-life that rule the Caspian nations were granted reprieve from their international pariah status. Tens of millions in U.S. military aid quickly followed.

Collectively, these countries are slated to receive almost \$40 million in U.S. military aid in 2004. In 2001, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan were under U.S. sanctions and received no military aid. The other five nations received a collective total of \$12.3 million in military aid. In other words, military aid from the United States will increase more than 200 percent in just three years—not including Congress' \$70 million Special Supplemental for Caspian countries in 2002.

In the Caspian, and in most of the other countries where U.S. military aid and training markedly increased in the past three years, the weapons are not being used to defend borders from impending invasions. Rather, military resources are used to squash indigenous movements for self-determination, undermine campaigns for human rights, punish those who call for democracy and government accountability, and protect leaders who came to power illegitimately.

There are a few exceptions to the "oil and democracy don't mix" maxim, and they are instructive. Norway, the United Kingdom and Canada are major oil suppliers to the United States, but were established democracies with diversified economies before getting into oil exploration. Replicating these successes in other oil-rich countries will require a radical revision of U.S. military and energy policy. Now would be a good time to start. ■

FRIDA BERRIGAN is a senior research associate with the Arms Trade Resource Center, a project of the World Policy Institute.

IN SHORT

When Susan J. Douglas asked our readers to heap scorn and ridicule on Bush ("Dissing Dubya," January 5, 2004), they responded in droves. Here are the best of the best.

Name That Electorate

"I think W would simply refer to us as his 'subjects' or maybe just 'the peasantry.'"

—BM, Seattle, WA

"We the Sheeple"

—Neil, Boise, ID

"The Conned-stituents"

—John Medeiros Westminster, VT

Nickname That President

"Bush Catastrophe and The Song 'n Dance Kid"

—Jerry Schneider, Fredericksburg, VA

"There was a clown character on TV years ago called Flub-a-dub. So ... Flub-a-Dubya."

—Jason, Houston, TX

"The Pretzeldent of the United States."

—Anthony McArthur, Edmonds, WA

"G.I. Joke"

—Helen, Tucson, AZ

"George W.M.D. Bush"

—David Irvine, Henderson, NC

How about we call him "Lonesome Dub," to point to the fact that only a handful of UN members are on speaking terms with us.

—The Counter Errorist, St. Louis, MO

My favorite nickname is the ever-hopeful "ex-president." —Lisa Ryan, Louisville, KY

Rename Those Initiatives

"Healthy Forests: No Tree Left Behind
Operation Iraqi Freedom: Family Feud II
Bush Energy Policy: No Donor Left Behind
or Just Tell Me What You Want, Ken
Medicare Modernization Bill: No Donor Left Behind II"

—Jim Winhold, Pleasant Plains, IL

Rename Those Backdrops

"How about 'the backdroppings'?"

—BM, Seattle, WA

MARTIN DUBERMAN

HAYMARKET A NOVEL

"YOU ARE DRIVING THE PEOPLE TO REVOLUTION. I DO NOT ADVOCATE FORCE, I MERELY PREDICT IT. VIOLENCE WILL COME NOT BECAUSE WE WANT IT, BUT BECAUSE YOU MAKE IT INEVITABLE!" — ALBERT PARSONS

"This wonderful novel is built around Chicago's Haymarket Riot in 1886... [a] deeply moving tale that works as both love story and political statement." — **Jay Freeman, *Booklist***

"If, as I believe, fiction is unique in its ability to rescue what is right and true from the platitudes of politicians and the compromises of journalism, then Martin Duberman has written an exemplar of what a political novel can be in the early 21st century. Captivating in its characters and compelling in its historical accuracy, *Haymarket* captures radicalism's heart Duberman has written a novel about what makes us American." — **Neil Gordon, *New Fiction Forum* Editor, *Boston Review***

"This book brings to exciting life a haunting episode in the ever-moving history of American labor." — **Vivian Gornick, author of *Fierce Attachments***

"*Haymarket* reveals Martin Duberman's unique combination of talents as historian and writer of imaginative literature. Through the story of Albert and Lucy Parsons, he brings to life the social texture and gross inequalities of Reconstruction Texas and of Gilded Age Chicago, and strikingly illuminates the radicalism that helped to shape modern America." — **Eric Foner, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University**



***HAYMARKET: A NOVEL* IS A TRUE-TO-HISTORY ACCOUNT of terror, revolution, and defiant love. Lucy Gonzalez and her husband, Albert Parsons, were at the center of the most bitter class conflict in U.S. history, stunningly recreated here by acclaimed historian and playwright Martin Duberman (*Left Out, Black Mountain, Paul Robeson, In White America*).**



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U.S. vs. Them

World Social Forum takes aim at empire. By Jeff Conant

MORE THAN 100,000 people from all continents gathered mid-January at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai, India. Their purpose was to debate and build alternatives to the neoliberal policies and corporate globalization that have left millions marginalized, landless and destitute.

This was a challenging site from which to pronounce the forum's slogan, "Another World is Possible": Among Mumbai's 18 million people are some of the world's most poor.

But within the filthy industrial complex at the far northern reaches of Mumbai, another world was manifest. On one of the thoroughfares crowded with signs demanding debt cancellation and nuclear disarmament, a Brazilian politician stopped to speak with a French slow-food activist. Next to them, a Swedish health rights advocate in a Chinese Communist Party hat strategized with a doctor from Tanzania.

Demands for peace held together this year's gathering, something of a change from the first WSF in 2001 that focused almost solely against the neoliberal policies fostered by the World Bank, IMF and WTO. If this year's gathering promises any single result, it is the fusing of these causes. As Arundhati Roy told the crowd, "There is not a country in the world now that is not caught in the crosshairs of the American cruise missile or the I.M.F. checkbook."

The first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, timed to coincide with the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland—an annual gathering where CEOs, academics and political leaders

chart the global economic agenda in closed rooms high in the Swiss Alps.

Mumbai was in many respects a perfect site for this year's gathering. The city is both a wealthy spectacle and home to millions of the world's poorest people, many of whom were displaced from their rural homes by large development projects, such as the infamous dams along the Narmada River, general agricultural crisis or lack of opportunity. Development analyst Devinder Sharma estimates that by 2010 Mumbai will be 80 percent slums.

In a speech to health rights activists, Walden Bello—another luminary in the struggle against global economic apartheid—made it clear that "the number one problem facing the world's poor today is Washington D.C." Throughout the winding paths and exhibition halls of the WSF grounds, placards reading "Dump Bush," "End U.S. Aggression," and "Down with American Empire" echoed the message.

But the nature of WSF is nonviolent and transformative, and, despite all the history every delegate brings, few remain unchanged during the five-day event. On the last day of the WSF, an Italian woman promoting a campaign to "Defeat Bush" rushed into the media center and informed all present that the campaign was changing its message.

"We are too negative," she says. "We need a positive message, one that Americans too can agree with. We have decided to change our slogan to 'A Better America is Possible.'" ■

APPALL-O-METER

3.9 Let Them Eat Newsprint

Conrad Black so perfectly embodies the stock character of the press lord that he ought to be considered a national treasure. The only question is, which nation should be lucky enough to call him its own? Black, now disgraced for his financial dealings with Hollinger International, the holding company for newspapers in Canada, Britain and the United States, earned derision a few years back when he renounced his Canadian citizenship in favor of a British passport. His motive was good, old-fashioned social climbing. After years of seeking an actual lordship, he switched allegiances across the ocean to get it.

Now wags are speculating that he will seek to reinstate his Canadian citizenship to make it more difficult to be extradited to the United States to stand trial for his financial shenanigans. His lawyers hotly deny this. Meanwhile, as the press shines a harsher light on the past business dealings of Lord Black of Crossharbour, newspaper readers are afforded entertaining glimpses of the potentate's famously haughty mien. *The Times* of London records this e-mail Black wrote to a Hollinger executive in 2002: "There has not been an occasion for many months when I got on our plane without wondering whether it was really affordable. But I'm not prepared to re-enact the French Revolutionary renunciation of the rights of the nobility. We are proprietors, after all, beleaguered though we may be." Can you hear the tumbrils rolling?



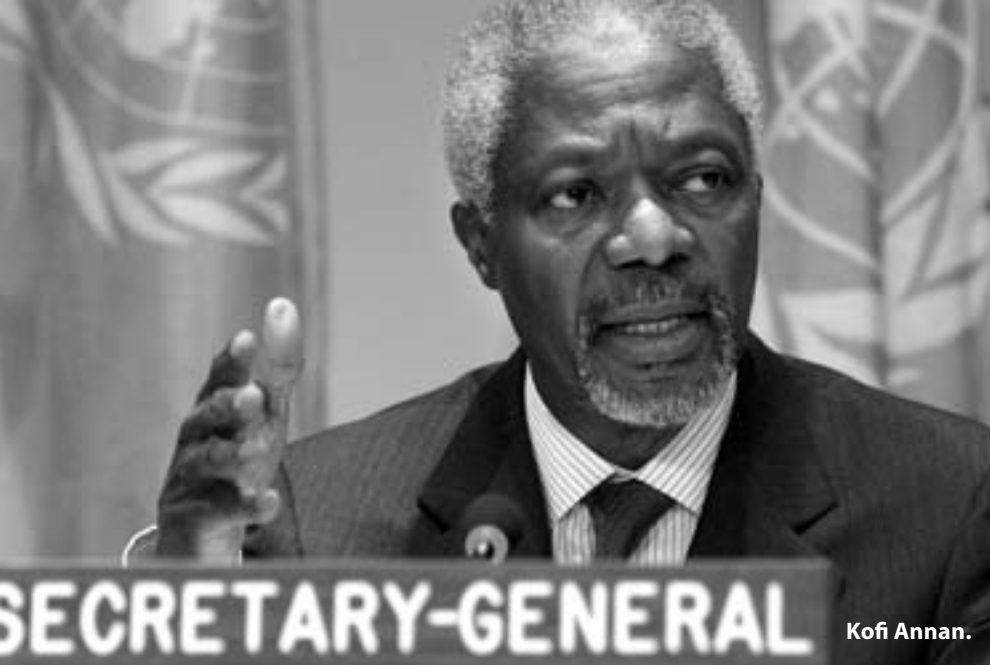
1.4 Pretty Vacant

The artist formerly known as Johnny Rotten will continue his lifelong career of self-degradation this winter when he joins the cast of "I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here," a reality series on Britain's ITV. Rotten, working now under his baptismal name, John Lydon, will be dropped in the Australian jungle to survive all manner of vicissitudes, not least of which is being voted off the show by the viewing public. According to the Associated Press, the ex-Sex Pistol will vie with a

celebrated topless model, a former Olympic track star, a pop pinup from the '80s, a nobleman once jailed for fraud, members of a girl group, a former BBC royal correspondent and other luminaries.

2.1 Vlad.com

Even though he's no longer running the KGB, Vladimir Putin still gives the impression of being a creepy dude. But give him credit for earnest attempts to soften his image. Consider the Web site his handlers set up, called "The President of Russia for Citizens of School Age." According to the BBC, the site is bright and friendly, picturing the Russian leader posing with cuddly animals, striking a pose in his judo get-up, smiling next to the Queen of England and so on. It even features questions that Russian schoolchildren might want to ask of their leader. Such as? "What should you do if you love the president too much?" and "Are you allowed to touch the president with your hands?" You know, the things kids are always wondering about. The answers, incidentally, are "Just calm down" and "No."



STEPHEN CHERNIN / GETTY IMAGES

Re-United Nations

U.S. admits U.N. role necessary for laying the electoral groundwork in Iraq. By Ian Williams

AT THE END of January, Kofi Annan called off the “strike” the United Nations declared in Iraq and agreed to return some staff to “ascertain the views of a broad spectrum of Iraqi society in the search for alternatives that might be developed to move forward to the formation of a provisional government.”

Annan's decision represents a new balance of power, one in which the United States admits that the United Nations has a genuinely “vital” role—one the Bush administration hitherto denied, preferring to push through a new handpicked regime.

It is beginning to look as if there may be real elections in Iraq this year, induced ironically by the presidential election here—and the toughness of Shia Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. He has been insisting, after more practical than theological research, that elections are possible and that no American-nominated government would be legitimate without them. Al-Sistani has assembled experts who showed that, between ID cards and ration cards, the logistics of registration for voters were eminently practicable. At the very least, he argues, the new Iraqi government should escape from the stigma of quislinghood that being picked by the United States would confer.

Annan made his decision very slowly and deliberately. It followed pressure from the Iraqis across the political spectrum but re-

sulted mostly from Washington's change of heart. At the last minute, Coalition Administrator Paul Bremer—who originally stayed away from the January meeting between the United Nations and the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC)—turned up with a beguiling smile. U.N. participants remarked on how “extraordinarily polite” the U.S. delegation was, which points to both the poor state of relations before and Washington's desperate need for an exit strategy now.

The Americans told other diplomats that everything was now on the table—except the timetable itself. Bush has to declare victory on June 30 and pull out before Democrats start pushing on Iraq. At stake is the formation of the Transitional Legislative Council, to which the United States wants to hand over power (nominally, at least) this summer—and arguably the 2004 presidential election.

Bremer and the Pentagon decided that elections were not “feasible,” so they opted for “cascading caucuses” in each governorate. Since most Americans have difficulty understanding the Iowa caucuses, it is not surprising that this proposal went down like a pork steak with many Iraqis. The process is complex—and could, without too much cynicism, look like Americans designating their own successors.

Indeed, Bremer's real problem was not the feasibility of elections but their

desirability. The fear is that the wrong people could end up getting elected. To be fair, it is not just the expedient friends of democracy in the Pentagon who have such worries. Experience in other transition countries shows the genuine perils of letting the first rush of post-tyrant elections set arrangements and parties in stone. With the mosaic of religious, ethnic and tribal differences in Iraq, it will be a challenge to create a democratic state that respects minority rights.

However, British observers suggest that the majority Shia are not necessarily either as sectarian or as monolithic a bloc as many fear. British spokesmen have lent credence to al-Sistani's case by admitting that elections are feasible. As Winston Churchill said, democracy is the worst form of government—except for all the others.

Iraqis seem to agree: According to one poll, 60 percent of Iraqis object to the U.S. occupation, and only 12 percent support it. So, any long term Iraqi government has to derive its authority from a more *halal* source than Bush and Bremer.

As al-Sistani suggests, that means the new government must have the blessing of the Iraqi people through elections or some other arrangement that is legitimized by the United Nations rather than by the American-led coalition. That explains the American and IGC pressure on Annan and the United Nations to bless the timetable and all its details.

The meeting at U.N. Headquarters revealed a convergence of views and interests. The Americans, despite their traditionally Panglossian announcements that they had dissuaded al-Sistani, are now so desperate to get out before the presidential election that they are prepared—indeed eager—to let in the United Nations and compromise with the Ayatollah.

The saner part of the coalition, represented by the British and the State Department, had worked hard to persuade Annan that if he follows his own and his staff's inclinations to stay out until the official end of the occupation, it would be difficult to shoehorn the United Nations in after constitutional arrangements have solidified. With that call echoed by a broad section of Iraqis, from the IGC to the Ayatollah, there appeared to be a genuine window of opportunity for the United Nations and Annan has now decided to take it. ■

IAN WILLIAMS regularly writes about the United Nations for *In These Times*.

Lou Sheldon calls gay people “dark forces” bent on destroying “faith and families.”

He backed quarantining people with AIDS and tried to quash the law shielding the disabled from bias. The national organization he heads, Traditional Values Coalition, gave money to Operation Rescue, a violent anti-abortion group. In the wake of 9/11, he joined the chorus to deny gays relief funds, even vowing to slam tight the gates of toleration and “get the foot out of the door.”

Sheldon, from his lair in Orange County, California, is a strong candidate for a face card in Bush’s deck of un-American extremists.

Instead, the president tapped him for faith-based adviser and gave him red-carpet treatment at the White House. Wooing Sheldon is just one twist in Bush’s romance with the far-right fringe.

Sheldon’s latest foray onto the supposedly sacred turf of local governance and personal liberty is his mission to Massachusetts. On November 18, the state’s Supreme Judicial Court gave the legislature until May to extend the right of civil marriage to same-sex couples. Two weeks later, Sheldon packed his carpetbag in Anaheim and pounced. Anxiety about gays is Sheldon’s gravy train, and the Massachusetts ruling is his chance to ride it round the state and coast to coast.

Like Bush, whose snarling State of the Union address endorsed the drive to limit marriage through a constitutional amendment, Sheldon smelled a chance to broaden his base. A corps of outright homophobes vote and donate, sure. But so do a host of fearful fence-sitters, unfamiliar and uneasy with gay couples.

Sheldon, unlike Bush, bares his teeth without obliqueness. He once wrote that “gays and lesbians live perverted, twisted lives that feed upon the unsuspecting and the innocent.” His is a public face that only a right-wing president seeking his first real mandate could love.

For both, the crux remains their masquerading as conservatives. Put aside Bush’s fiscal budget busting, which a growing claque of elected GOPers and grassroots activists condemn. On social issues, even some conservatives get edgy about the feds enforcing curbs that stigmatize gay people and slam the door on protection they seek, such as visiting a sick partner in the hospital. Sheldon, a bona fide extremist, would do precisely this by writing second-class status for homosexuals into the constitutions of several states and the nation. Never mind that federal law and most state codes already bar same-sex marriage. Is Bush so eager to take the plunge for religious right votes that he will walk this plank with his bigoted beau?

Sheldon has a history of turning into a liability in the harsh light of elections. In 1994, his supposedly nonpartisan charity took \$47,000 from the California GOP to churn out voter guides, only to see this shady quid pro quo blow up in the press a year later—but after Republicans won. Still unrepentant in 1998, Sheldon’s nonprofit took \$50,000 from moderate U.S. Senate candidate Matt Fong for “voter education efforts.” In late October, the tables turned. Hard upon news of the gay-bashing murder of Wyoming college student Matthew Shepard, revelation of the Sheldon gift

HANS JOHNSON
writes about labor, religion and politics from Washington, D.C.

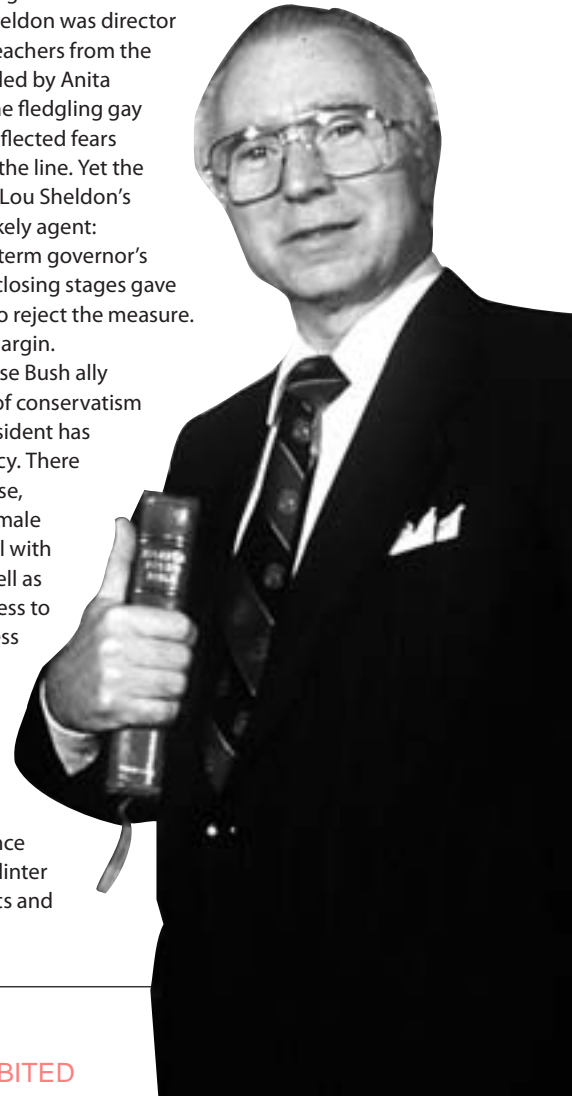
Bush’s Sheldon Game

By Hans Johnson

on the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s front page rocked Fong’s toss-up race to topple Barbara Boxer. Liberals labeled Sheldon “irrational” and “mean-spirited,” and many gay Republicans defected. Boxer won a cakewalk.

Californians’ visceral reaction against Sheldon crosses the political spectrum. In 1978 Sheldon was director of a statewide drive to ban gay teachers from the public schools. The measure, fueled by Anita Bryant’s demagoguery, awoke the fledgling gay community. Its massive outcry reflected fears that life and livelihoods were on the line. Yet the knockout blow that year against Lou Sheldon’s brand of hate came from an unlikely agent: Ronald Reagan. The former two-term governor’s denunciation in the campaign’s closing stages gave conservative voters permission to reject the measure. The referendum failed by a 4-3 margin.

Sheldon’s resurrection as a close Bush ally undercuts the president’s claim of conservatism and shows how radically the president has strayed from even Reagan’s legacy. There was Sheldon in the People’s House, applauding with a cadre of pale male policy-makers and cheek-by-jowl with Jerry “Blame-Gays-for-9/11” Falwell as Bush signed a law restricting access to late-term abortion. Bush’s coziness with domestic extremists makes a mockery of his espoused commitment after 9/11 to fight for “progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.” It exposes him as a divider, not a uniter. Yet the same unholy alliance he cultivates with radicals will splinter off some voters for the Democrats and could spell his own defeat. ■





Power Pop *By Ana Marie Cox*

Gilding The Donald

What does it mean that a show that asks us to root for someone to lose his job has found an audience in a jobless economic recovery?

IF YOU OR I WERE to enter Donald Trump's apartment—or, as Trump calls it, “the most beautiful apartment in the whole world”—we would at best stifle a burst of helpless laughter. It is testimony to the combined power of television and greed that the contestants on “The Apprentice”—NBC's new internship-as-reality television show—enter the apartment in a state of awed supplication, cooing and giggling over the gilded door knobs and the too-obvious-to-even-be considered-metaphorical mirrors.

And then they start to suck up. It says a lot about both the show and Trump himself—who is co-producer and star—that the apartment tour was that week's prize.

“The Apprentice” is now in its fourth week, and its relative success in the crowded field of amateur hour productions—from “American Idol” to “Fear Factor”—hinges upon its ingenious grafting together of “Survivor” with '80s teenploitation pic *Risky Business*.

The contestants—who have been carefully selected to represent a wide variety of stereotypes, from the scrappy loud-mouth salesman to the slick, bitchy consultant—are split into teams of men and women. The teams then go head-to-head in entrepreneur-themed tasks. The first week, they sold lemonade. The next, they designed an ad campaign. Another competition was a kind of conspicuous consumption scavenger hunt, in which teams hunted for the best prices on a shopping list that included gold bullion, a high-end “Big Bertha” golf club and a leg waxing for a member of the team—including the men. (An altogether painful form of hilarity ensues.)

The losing team sends the three members deemed “most responsible” for the failure to “the boardroom” where Mr. Trump himself decides along with his toadying pair of corporate advisers who will hear “You're fired.”

What does it mean that a show that asks us to root for someone to lose his or her job has found an audience in the midst of a jobless economic recovery? Are we that callous, or that unselfconscious? Or maybe, like the contestants—and like our president—the audience

is focused on the prize, not the punishment that's meted out along the way.

The winner of “The Apprentice” will get the “dream job of a lifetime” with the Trump Organization and a salary of \$250,000. It's never spelled out any more clearly than that, though while watching the show, I often wonder about what this “dream job” might be. The young contestants talk as if it were some combination of a winning lottery ticket and a papal dispensation, alternating between statements like, “If I get that job I'll

be set for life” and “I've got to let Mr. Trump see that I'm the one who really deserves that job.” But what if the job is to arrange The Donald's toupees in alphabetical order? Or polishing the stripper poles in his casinos?

Even if the job is official fluffy bed inspector or chief chocolate-covered-strawberry taster, it is probably better—from the show's producers' point of view—to keep the specifics from the contestants. Because once a job's duties are delineated, you can ask reasonably yourself, “What would I

do to get it?” But if it's some imaginary “dream job of a lifetime,” how do you put a limit on what you'll sacrifice? And make no mistake: The sacrifices made by the contestants on “The Apprentice” go much farther than simply unsightly leg hair.

There are the relatively minor indignities of the tasks themselves, but then there's what they do to win. The women's team has resorted to flashing their bellies at fishmongers to get a better price on squid on the luxury-item scavenger hunt. A member of the men's team openly begged Trump—and asked if it would help if he got on his knees—to keep his place on the show.

I suppose the drawing and quartering of an individual's dignity is at the heart of the appeal of all reality shows; what makes the shamelessness of the “The Apprentice” contestants so engrossing is the poverty of the stakes they are competing for. The competitors on other shows *win* money; but some poor saps on “The Apprentice” are going to have to keep suffering humiliation at the hands of The Donald, long after the final credits end. ■



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Reparations Suit Leaves Opening

CHICAGO HAS BECOME THE DE FACTO CENTER of the slavery reparations movement. Alderman Dorothy Tillman organized the first national reparations conference in 2001 and was the prime mover of a city ordinance that supports congressional hearings on reparations. Tillman later successfully lobbied the City Council to pass the Slave Era Disclosure Act, an ordinance that requires companies doing business with the city to reveal connections to slavery. Chicago was the first large city to pass such legislation.

The city also is home base to Conrad Worrill, chair of the National Black United Front and one of the nation's leading reparations advocates. Worrill convened a host of conferences and symposia related to the issue of reparations and organized a national reparations march in 2002.

There was a time, not long ago, when the issue of reparations for slavery and Jim Crow apartheid was barely broached in polite company. Even civil rights activists found the subject too incendiary. The quest for reparations was pursued primarily by fringe Black Nationalist groups and was considered a distant issue for the average African American. In fact, reparations advocates often were ridiculed for pushing what was considered an implausible scheme.

In November 1999, a *Washington Post* story on the subject started like this: "The subject is scalding hot, untouchable as public policy. Even the brave run from it."

Times sure have changed.

Chicago may be leading the pack, but pro-reparations resolutions have passed in city council chambers across the country, including Cleveland, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Los Angeles and Oakland, Calif. Most of these resolutions urge support for a bill annually introduced by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) that seeks "to establish a commission to examine the institution of slavery ... and economic discrimination against African-Americans ... to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies."

Last month, two Chicago courtrooms served as venues for debating such remedies. In January, a class-action suit was filed seeking reparations for descendants of enslaved Africans from 71 defendants, including banks and tobacco and cotton firms, alleging they did not comply with Chicago's Slave Era Disclosure Act. The suit was filed by Bob Brown, a longtime activist and co-director of a group called

Pan-African Roots, and does not seek financial damages. Rather, it calls for defendants to release files and records to account for all profits accrued from slavery. Later that month, U.S. District Court Judge Charles R. Norgle Sr. also dismissed a class-action reparations suit alleging that companies like the Lehman Brothers brokerage firm, Aetna Insurance, FleetBoston Financial Corp. and R. J. Reynolds Tobacco were "unjustly enriched" by slavery.

Other reparations lawsuits filed around the country were consolidated in the case before Norgle, and his decision dismisses their suits as well.

However, the judge ruled "without prejudice," leaving the door open for further litigation. There is little doubt such litigation will come. A team of lawyers dubbed the Reparations Assessment Group—an association of legal heavyweights including Harvard's Charles Ogletree and Johnnie Cochran—is reportedly planning a high-powered legal action beyond the strategy of class-action suits, and members of Harvard's highly regarded and well connected "dream team" of black public intellectuals are mobilizing their talents to force a national discussion on the issue.

It's safe to say that the issue of reparations has arrived. And that's a good thing. Our slavery-tainted past prevents us from coming to grips with our racially divided present. How else can we explain our nation's wide racial disparities without factoring in the legacy of slavery? The reparations idea provides a conceptual framework for understanding the crippling affects of that legacy and suggests possible remedies.

Norgle argued in his ruling: "The injury alleged cannot be 'conjectural or hypothetical.' While most would like to assume that they will be beneficiaries to their ancestor's wealth upon their demise, this is a mere assumption."

By reducing racial disparities to an "assumption," Norgle adheres to a long tradition. But few social scientists would deny that 14 generations of slavery and another century of apartheid were transferred through the generations in inferior social status and poor quality of such things as employment, education and healthcare.

If Americans remain ignorant of slavery's crippling social and economic legacy and its cultural implications, they are unlikely to ever get at the root of those inequities. If nothing else, the reparations debate will help alleviate that ignorance. ■

It's safe to say that the issue of reparations has arrived. And that's a good thing.

SALIM MUWAKKIL is a senior editor at *In These Times*, a contributing columnist to the *Chicago Tribune* and a *Crime and Communities Media Fellow* of the Open Society Institute.



Dems Vie for Star Slot

BY DAVID MOBERG

ONE MESSAGE WAS CLEAR FROM the first two battles of the primary season: The economy, healthcare and the war in Iraq may be big issues for voters, but the determination of many Democrats in Iowa and New Hampshire to defeat Bush profoundly shaped the results. With that focus, voters lifted Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts out of a self-created slump into two strong victories that made him the clear frontrunner and seriously crippled former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean's previously formidable insurgency.

The success of Kerry—and to a lesser extent Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina—also resulted from intense assaults on Dean's electability from much of the press, conservative Democrats and the other presidential candidates except Edwards. The harsh exchange in Iowa between Missouri Rep. Dick Gephardt and Dean hurt both campaigns and opened the door for a revamped Kerry and an upbeat Edwards, who eloquently denounced the “two Americas,” one for the rich and the other for everyone else. Even the Rev. Al Sharpton—doing little campaigning, but advised by Republican consultant Roger

Stone—hurt Dean by scolding him in the last debate in Iowa for not having blacks or Hispanics in his Vermont cabinet. Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich, whose progressive campaign never caught fire, attacked Dean from the left, while Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, staking out a distinctive but obviously unpopular position on the right of the primary spectrum, did little to advance his own cause but continuously raised doubts about Dean's viability.

Dean rhetoric raised the bar

Yet for all their attacks, Kerry and Edwards owe much of their success to Dean, who more than anyone else defined the message and the tone for the campaign. Kerry, Gephardt and Edwards, despite their initial support for the war in Iraq, became increasingly critical of Bush's conduct of the war. Dean's message to voters—“you have the power”—and his critique of Bush and feckless Democrats pushed the other candidates toward more populist rhetoric, even to the point of borrowing his lines. Gen. Wesley Clark, for example, modified Dean's “take back America” to “take America back.”

Yet, as the other candidates adopted more of the rhetoric of class—fighting for the less privileged against powerful special interests—Dean lost ground with voters on the key issues of the economy and healthcare. Kerry beat him by a wide margin among New Hampshire voters concerned about those issues, despite Dean's healthcare credentials and his emphasis on balancing the budget, which so far has had limited political traction.

Dean obviously hurt himself with his tendency to shoot from the lip. While many voters liked his candor, news coverage amplified his quips at the expense of substantive policy issues. The "storyline" was quickly established that Dean was the "angry" candidate of "Bush-haters," a line reinforced by Republicans who have taken to calling any serious criticism of Bush "political hate speech."

On the campaign trail, however, Dean spoke with a calm, analytical demeanor, even if he was blunt and harsh in his criticism. The storyline could have been that he was the frank candidate—maybe even the passionate candidate. Indeed, Dean's speech after the Iowa caucuses, which got more television time than any of his critiques of Bush, was more a reaction to audience enthusiasm than an angry "scream." But Dean's slipups and his failure to craft a strong and sympathetic personal story to which people could relate clearly increased his vulnerability.

Kerry's comeback owes much to his campaign highlighting his record as a heroic young soldier in Vietnam, a story that humanized him, giving this son of privilege an everyman appeal and reinforcing the sense that he could stand up to Bush on national security—also the key appeal of Clark.

But supporting a candidate because he is "electable" is a coolly calculated and ephemeral political commitment. Any passion for Kerry, for example, seems to come less for the man himself than that he represents a vehicle to defeat Bush. If electability is the issue, how did Kerry become so dramatically more electable in a matter of weeks? The capture of Saddam may have altered some voters' calculations, and the new, improved populist message made him more appealing (as it did Edwards, who was able to expand on his more limited biographical attraction as the son of a millworker).

Voters second-guess one another

Voters always are influenced by perceptions of a candidate's chances of being elected. Their desire to be with a winner certainly helps Kerry, especially since at least one *Newsweek* poll just before the New Hampshire primary showed him beating Bush by a small margin. Primary voters this year have often sounded more like professional campaign strategists than citizens picking leaders who champion their issues. In that way the Democratic primary resembles economist John Maynard Keynes' description of stock markets. Rather than picking a company based on its intrinsic merits, Keynes argued, the successful stock-picker guesses which stock is most likely to be picked by other people. In the primary, voters are partly deciding not on the basis of which candidate they like but on whom they believe a majority of Americans will like next November.

That's an inherently risky guess, given that world events and public opinion can change dramatically, and it also involves placing bets on strategy.

Edwards, for example, claims he can run well in the South, but that may be largely a dead end for Democrats except in Florida, given Tennessee native Al Gore's 2000 performance there. How Hispanics vote in the Southwest may be more critical, given that the races there are tighter and the growing Hispanic population gives Democrats an opening. Kerry and Clark claim that their military experience inoculates them against Bush attacks on the national security issue, but Republicans have proved their willingness to question the valor and patriotism of triple-amputee veteran Max Cleland, the U.S. senator from Georgia who lost his reelection bid in 2002. Dean claims he will stand up to Bush and bring out new, formerly apathetic voters, critical to a progressive strategy but difficult to execute. Lieberman essentially says Republicans can't attack him on taxes, values and the war in Iraq because he is much like them on these issues.

Supporting a candidate because of their "electability" is a coolly calculated and ephemeral political commitment.

Taking a positive stand

Electability arguments too often are framed defensively—how a particular Democratic candidate can withstand divisive Republican appeals on religion and conservative values, military toughness, gun ownership and cutting taxes. But the best defense may be a strong offense. Candidates on the offensive have a chance of defining the debate—as Dean did on the war and, despite his awkward style, in appealing to class interests that bring together black and white voters. Democrats can also be proactive by attacking corporate abuses of power, as Dean, Edwards, Kucinich and Kerry all have done to varying degrees.

The goal in politics is—or ought to be—not just winning but defining what needs to be done, then developing a strategy to win majority support for those objectives. After his second-place finish in New Hampshire, Dean said that in the next primaries he would focus not just on defeating Bush but on changing the country.

New Hampshire voters said they backed the candidate who most stands up for what he believes in—and Dean won their support over Kerry by more than a 2-to-1 margin. But Kerry overwhelmingly won their vote when it came to electability. One-fifth of voters said they backed the candidate who could best defeat George Bush—a margin Kerry won almost 6-to-1 over Dean.

With electability looming so large, the odds favor victory by the candidate who best can stand up to Bush. Although Kerry was on a roll, many Democrats still did not have a clear idea of what he stands for—and his early victories do not prove he is that candidate. ■

Deceptive as ever; more pedestrian than usual.

Decoding Dubya

BY DAVID KUSNET

Precisely
because it
sounded
more like a
stump speech
than a State
of the Union
message,
Bush's
rhetoric offers
a preview of
the language
he'll use in
his reelection
campaign.

WHEN HE DELIVERS IMPORTANT speeches, President Bush benefits from being "misunderestimated," to borrow a malapropism he muttered during his campaign four years ago. His acceptance speech at the Republican Convention in 2000, his inaugural address, his speech to the Joint Session of Congress after the 9/11 terror attacks, and his first two State of the Union addresses all were favorably received by the news media and by most Americans. Until now, all Bush had to do was read a prepared text without stumbling and the press would applaud and the public would breathe a sigh of relief.

But his luck ran out with his recent State of the Union speech. It was the most partisan and pedestrian major speech he has ever given. Fox News' Fred Barnes declared that, while he'd heard Bush deliver many eloquent speeches, "this was not one of them." The *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page called the speech "generally lackluster." And a *Newsweek* survey conducted after the speech found that 52 percent of voters don't want Bush to win reelection.

Inexplicably, Bush abandoned the techniques that had served him and his speechwriters so well since his first presidential race. Up until now, Bush was careful to convey the impression that he is "a compassionate conservative" who feels and tries to heal other people's pain. But in this State of the Union speech, he offered no condolences to the families of those who have been killed or wounded in Iraq, or commiseration with those who are still out of work here at home. Did his speechwriters forget to include what would usually be a routine expression of human sympathy for others' suffering? Did Bush and his usually alert communications adviser Karen Hughes fail to notice what was missing? Most likely, military families and households with jobless workers did notice that Bush didn't mention their plight. And they'll remember in November.

Gone, too, was Bush's usual tone of nonpartisan national leadership. Typically, he avoids the words "Republican" or "Democrat," refrains from attacking his adversaries or

answering their arguments and finds ways to praise leaders from the other side of the aisle, such as Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.). But this State of the Union speech consisted largely of responses to criticisms of the Patriot Act, the Iraq War and his tax cuts. And it was filled with not-so-veiled references to his rivals in this year's election, finding ways to attack gay marriage initiatives in John Kerry's Massachusetts and Howard Dean's Vermont and trial lawyers such as Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.).

Bush didn't mention his most visionary program—revisiting the moon and conducting a mission to Mars. And he offered only a brief explanation of his most controversial proposal—a new guest worker program. But he did call for an end to the use of steroids by athletes (but what about the body-building governor of California?).

Absent also were memorable phrases (instead of "the axis of evil," there was the clumsy circumlocution "weapons of mass destruction-related programs"), a forward-looking agenda for domestic policy or an overarching theme to define Bush's presidency for the voters this year and historians in years to come. Many previews of the speech suggested that Bush would call for an "ownership society," presenting his proposals for partially privatizing Social Security, offering tax credits for families purchasing their own health coverage and making top-bracket tax cuts permanent, as if they would help most Americans to accumulate wealth. But the word "ownership" appeared only once in the speech, and the only unifying idea was the repetition of the word "war" 12 times. While Bush has striven to cast himself as a modern-day Winston Churchill, confronting dangers that others refuse to recognize, this speech recalled Churchill's famous remark when he rejected a dessert placed in front of him: "This pudding has no theme."

Worst of all, the speech framed the choice confronting Congress and the country as: "We can go forward with confidence and resolve ... or we can turn back to old policies and divisions." Other presidents, among them Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, have used this rhetorical device when running for reelection, but, by the time they were saying this, each could make a plausible case that the nation was in better shape than when he had



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taken office. Now, the economy is doing better than it was halfway through Bush's first term but not nearly as well as when he was inaugurated. So what would Bush argue that America shouldn't "turn back" to? An economy that approached full employment? A federal surplus of more than \$200 billion? A more peaceful world where America enjoyed more prestige? In his attempt to cast the Clinton years as the bad old days, the worst Bush can conjure is "the dangerous illusion that terrorists are not plotting and outlaw regimes are no threat to us" (views that Clinton never held) and "the old policies and old divisions" (although the nation's political life is even more polarized than it was four years ago).

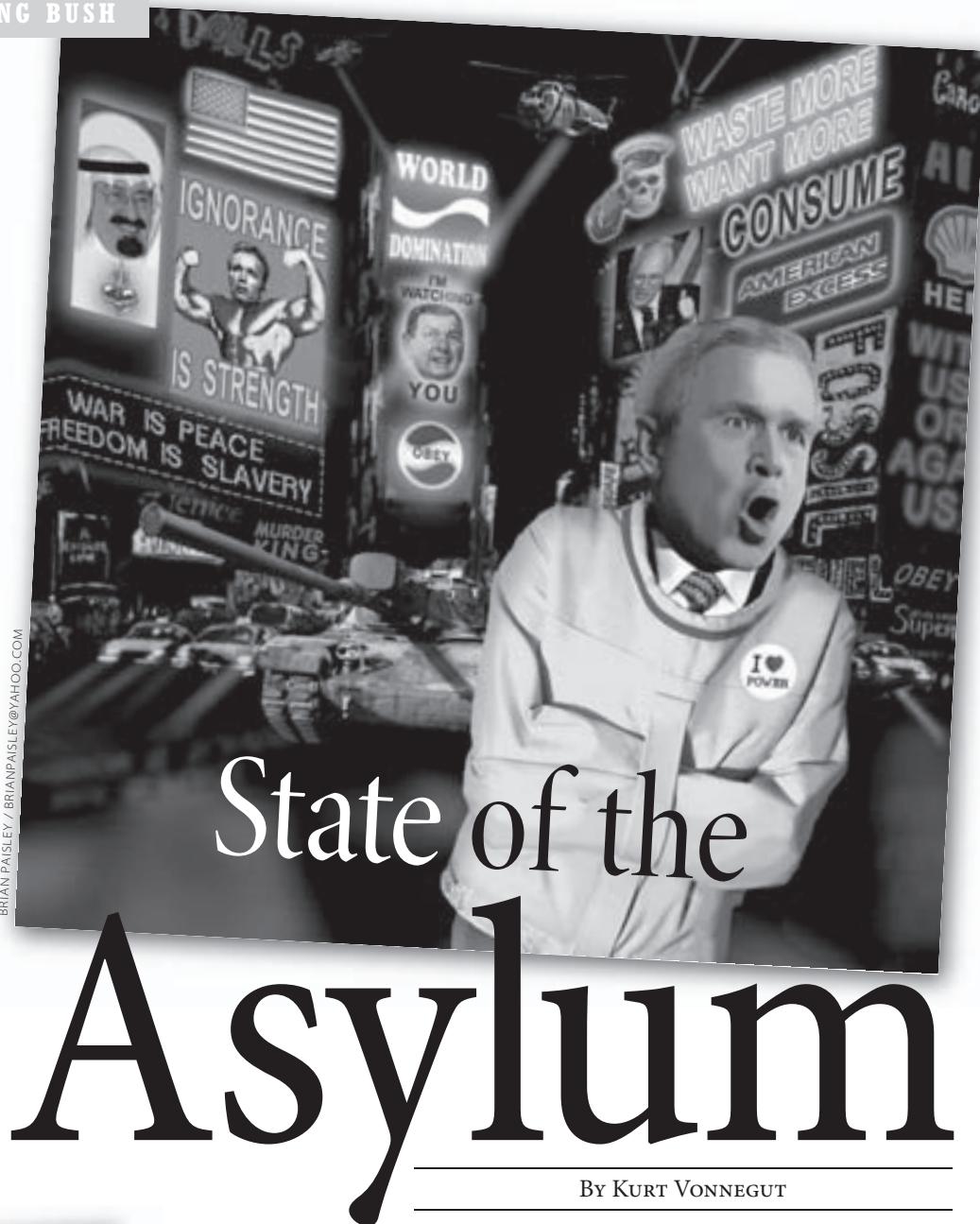
Precisely because it sounded more like a stump speech than a State of the Union message, Bush's rhetoric offers a preview of the language he'll use in the reelection campaign. While he would never say, "The only thing I have to offer is fear itself," the entire speech was framed by the report on the war on terror. Its sequence was revealing—first the counterattack against al-Qaeda, then the victory in Afghanistan against the Taliban,

and, only then, the war with Iraq and the capture of Saddam. Implicitly, this presents the Iraq war as one more successful engagement in the continuing conflict with international terrorism. Turning to domestic issues, the speech uses the focus-group-tested lexicon recommended by Republican pollster Frank Luntz, calling the estate tax the "death tax" and tax cuts "tax relief." And he continues to hide the tax cuts for top-bracket earners, wealthy investors and heirs to huge investors behind the less substantial benefits for most Americans—increasing the child tax credit, reducing the "marriage penalty" and "cut[ting] taxes on small business."

In his longest speech ever, he glossed over the realities of the country's condition and Americans' lives—how many jobs have been lost (more than 2 million), how many families have lost their health insurance (3.4 million), how little wages have increased (less than 1 percent) and how high the deficit has grown (to almost \$500 billion). For those who are challenging Bush, the challenge is to discuss the real state of the union clearly and convincingly. ■

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State of the Asylum

BY KURT VONNEGUT

ON ORANGE
ALERT HERE.
ECONOMIC TERRORIST
ATTACK EXPECTED AT
8 PM EST.
KV

EDITOR'S NOTE On the afternoon of Tuesday, January 20, *In These Times* received a fax:

ON ORANGE ALERT HERE. ECONOMIC TERRORIST ATTACK EXPECTED AT 8 PM EST. KV

Worried, we called Kurt Vonnegut. What did he know?! He said he would tell us when he had more complete information. The next morning we received another fax, a transcript of a conversation he had, he said, with the out-of-print science fiction writer Kilgore Trout.

TROUT Did you watch the State of the Union address?

KV Yes, and it certainly helped to remember what the

late British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell called this planet.

TROUT Which was?

KV "The lunatic asylum of the Universe." He said the inmates had taken over and were trashing the joint. And he wasn't talking about the germs or the elephants. He meant we the people.

TROUT There was certainly nothing in our president's behavior to match Howard Dean's tarantella after he placed third in Iowa.

KV That was straitjacket and padded cell stuff. I'm glad he put on such a show, since it dramatized a fatal flaw in our Constitution.

TROUT Which is?

KV Only a nut would run for president. As far as that goes, only disturbed people ran for president of my class

in high school. My point is that doing a Dean isn't the only way to show how disconnected you are from what is really going on.

TROUT For example?

KV I'm in New York City, where they mainstream the clinically insane, turn 'em loose on the streets. There could be a little old lady on Times Square, crooning in subzero weather, crooning to nobody in particular about all she has done to make this a better country, safer, better educated, more prosperous and so on. She believes it with all her heart, but it isn't true.

TROUT And?

KV I only want to say about our president, our armed forces' Commander-in-Chief: He believes whatever he says. He might be the sincerest person in the whole wide world. He should be in a movie. Correction: He *is* in a movie, a made-for-TV movie, which is now our form of government.

TROUT You don't feel that his tax cuts have staved off a depression?

KV Staved it off? Arnold Schwarzenegger's California is *ganz gebusted*.

TROUT "*Ganz gebusted*?"

KV German for "broke," unable to pay for even the most basic public services. Governor Schwarzenegger, whom I met when he was nothing but "Mr. Universe," now thinks he can sell bonds for the next generation to pay off. *Hasta la vista*, Baby. And every state and municipality in America is *ganz gebusted*. You think Baghdad is a mess? Wait till you see Kokomo, Indiana, two years from now.

TROUT What about President Bush's statement that he gave a tax cut to the rich because they could make wiser use of it than the government ever could?

KV Sincere!

TROUT That's all?

KV He told the truth! Even a stopped clock tells the truth once every 12 hours. Who couldn't make better use of money? Would you just look what the federal government has done with the bil-

lions and billions of public money we used to have in our treasury? This administration has squandered it all, and then some, on Rube Goldberg devices for protecting us from—or blowing the crap out of—Arabs, most of whom could never attack us even if they wanted to. It was Saudis who knocked down the Twin Towers. Anybody notice that? And we act as though the Saudis are as pure as the Virgin Mary.

TROUT Thank you. I think that's enough for now. You look as though you're about to do a Dean.

KV This war is making billionaires out of millionaires, and trillionaires out of billionaires, and they own television, and they bankroll George Bush, and not because he's against gay marriage.

TROUT Yes, well, do get some rest, or maybe take a swim, a total change of environment.

KV You want to hear about a *really* crazy guy?

TROUT OK.

KV Napoleon! He was so crazy he thought he was *Napoleon*! But what made his case so *unfunny*, in fact *catastrophic*, was that he, unlike the little old lady on Times Square, held real power! He was already, and no kidding, *Emperor*! So, as a consequence of his delusion, there would be absolutely genuine screams of agony and blood and guts all over the place—for years to come.

TROUT OK.

KV You don't think this is the Lunatic Asylum of the Universe?

TROUT I don't think I expressed an opinion one way or the other.

KV We are killing this planet as a life-support system with the poisons from all the thermodynamic whoopee we're making with atomic energy and fossil fuels, and everybody knows it, and practically nobody cares. This is how crazy we are. I think the planet's immune system is trying to get rid of us with AIDS and new strains of flu and tuberculosis, and so on, but I think it's too late. I don't think even *it* can keep George W. Bush from getting elected to a second term.

TROUT Peace. ■

Devil in the Details

By Naomi Klein

"The people of Iraq are free," declared U.S. President George W. Bush in his State of the Union speech. The day before, 100,000 Iraqis begged to differ. They took to the streets of Baghdad shouting "Yes, yes to elections. No, no to selection."

According to Iraq occupation chief Paul Bremer, there really is no difference between the White House's version of freedom and the one being demanded on the street by supporters of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. It was, he said, a mere quibble over details. "I don't want to go into the technical details of refinements," he said. "There are—if you talk to experts in these matters—all kinds of ways to organize partial elections and caucuses.

And I'm not an election expert, so I don't want to go into the details."

I'm not an election expert either, but I'm pretty sure there are differences here that cannot be refined. Al-Sistani's supporters want every Iraqi to have a vote and for the people they elect to write the laws of the country—your basic, imperfect, representative democracy.

Bremer wants his Coalition Provisional Authority to appoint the members of 18 regional Organizing Committees. The Organizing Committees will then select delegates to form 18 Selection Caucuses. These selected delegates will then further select representatives to a Transitional National Assembly. The Assembly will have an internal

vote to select an executive and ministers who will form the new government of Iraq. This, Bush said in the State of the Union, constitutes "a transition to full Iraqi sovereignty."

Got that? Iraqi sovereignty will be established by appointees appointing appointees to select appointees to select appointees. Add to that the fact that Bremer was appointed to his post by President Bush and that Bush was appointed to his by the U.S. Supreme Court, and you have the glorious new democratic tradition of the Appointocracy: rule by appointee's appointee's appointees' appointees' appointees' selectees. ■

NAOMI KLEIN is the author of *No Logo* and, most recently, *Fences and Windows*.

Buy In Now, Pay Later

By DEAN BAKER

ANYONE HOPING THAT PRESIDENT BUSH would produce a plan to help the nation's workers through difficult times was sure to be disappointed by his State of the Union address. Not only did he fail to present any solutions, he doesn't even seem to realize that we have a problem. He boasted about low inflation at a time when the Federal Reserve Board has expressed concerns that the economy risks deflation. He touted the current low interest rates, which the Fed has quite explicitly maintained because of the extraordinarily weak state of the economy.

It is understandable that the president wouldn't dwell on bad news in his speech, but it seems only reasonable to acknowledge the obvious. For the first time since the Great Depression, the United States has gone three years without creating any jobs. Since the job loss also has been accompanied by a shortening of workweeks, the total number of hours worked in the economy is back to its November 1998 level. While the current 5.7 percent unemployment rate is not very high by historic standards, the ratio of employed workers to population (which economists recognize as a more meaningful measure of the labor



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market's strength) is down more than 2 full percentage points from its 2000 peak. This corresponds to a drop in employment of more than 4 million people. Not surprisingly, the weakness in the labor market also brought an end to the strong wage growth of the late '90s.

Unfortunately, the outlook for the near future in a Bush administration doesn't look much brighter. His top priority is more tax cuts for the wealthy. More tax breaks, coupled with more military spending, will divert money from productive uses while providing little stimulus to the economy. The president's biggest hope is that the current housing bubble can continue to sustain the economy through the election; the damage that will result when it bursts can be dealt with later. ■

DEAN BAKER is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, D.C.

Second-Class Citizenship

By Juan Gonzalez

In his State of the Union address, President Bush asked Congress to reform U.S. immigration laws "to reflect our values and benefit our economy." But what he calls a new guest worker program, which matches "willing foreign workers with willing employers when no Americans can be found to fill the job," is a scam Latinos know all too well.

Welcome to Wal-Mart's Bracero Program.

During the early 20th Century, U.S. companies routinely recruited hundreds of thousands of Mexicans for industrial jobs in the West and the Midwest. Whenever the economy soured, the migrants were rounded up and deported by the trainload. Then came the World War II "Bracero Program," a scheme to recruit Mexicans for U.S. agribusiness,

which led to such terrible abuses that Lyndon Johnson mercifully ended it in 1964.

Remember when the feds accused Wal-Mart last year of illegally employing hundreds of undocumented workers as janitors? Under Bush's plan, corporations like Wal-Mart won't have to resort to clandestine exploitation. They'll hire all the immigrants they want at super-low wages—and it will be legal. Should a guest worker dare demand better treatment, the corporations can simply revoke his certification, triggering immediate deportation proceedings.

It's no secret that Hispanics comprise a huge share of the 8 million undocumented workers in this country, or that Bush needs a bigger share of the Latino vote to assure reelection. And he will spend from now

until November seeking to persuade Latino voters how hard he worked to solve the immigration problem.

But Bush's bracero program would only create a new permanent American underclass—one with fewer rights than legal residents. Forget the hype about matching "willing workers" and "willing employees" for jobs Americans don't want. Bush knows, as does the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which immediately endorsed the plan, that the best way to get an American worker to refuse a job is to offer a wage so miserable only a desperate immigrant would take it. ■

JUAN GONZALEZ is a columnist with the New York Daily News and is co-host of KPFA's 'Democracy Now!'

Ghost Writer

BY STUDS TERKEL

HAVE A SCOOP. I KNOW who wrote Dubya's State of the Union address. It was William Claude Dukenfield, a.k.a. W.C. Fields. Rarely has the master of outrageous humor been in such top form.

Unfortunately, he was unavailable to deliver the monologue himself. His choice as surrogate was an inspired one: a comic known as Dubya. Though this clown was not celebrated for his quickness of wit, his "speech" was a lulu. For some unexplained reason, nobody laughed.

When Dubya, deadpan fashion, spoke of the liberation of Iraq, a day after 100,000 Baghdadis gathered in the streets, hollering, in effect, "Vamoose, Yankees," the Capitol's extras, as directed by the master, stood up on cue and applauded.

When Dubya spoke of "No Child Left Behind," he momentarily goofed. He said "child," instead of "child's." Remember in *The Old-Fashioned Way* (1934), one of Field's great moments was his surreptitiously booting Baby Leroy in his little behind.

When Dubya defended the U.S. Patriot Act, memories of Fields and his buddy, Tammany Young, in *It's a Gift* (1934) were evoked. Recall the scene when the two grabbed the withered old crone at the end of the bar and tossed her out, thus freeing the saloon of a terrorist.

Dubya's interpretation of the tax cuts—who is screwing whom—was basically a variant on Fields' classic dictum, "Never give a sucker an even break."

The memory evoked by that sequence of his performance was of the most moral movie ever made, a two-reeler, *The Fatal Glass of Beer* (1933). Fields and his wife, Rosemary Theby, are seated in a shack in the Frozen North. They are awaiting the release of their nebbish son from the pokey where he had spent time because of embezzling funds. After a rapturous greeting of their lost but now found boy, Fields asked, "Where's the money, son?" The poor soul replied, "Father, I've gone straight and returned the money to the rightful owners." Without missing a beat, Fields and the missus took the boy by his arms and feet and tossed him out into the blizzard. Came the master's most memorable line, "It ain't a fit night out for man or beast."

After Dubya's performance, it may not be a fit night out for man or beast, but it was not a bad job by the boy. I have seen and heard better at the Rialto burlesque house, but, after all, Dubya was only a stand-in for the Great One. ■



HIGHWAY ROBBERY

Transportation Racism & New Routes to Equity

Robert D. Bullard, Glenn S. Johnson, and Angel O. Torres, editors

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Education Eugenics

BY GREG PALAST

GO AHEAD, GEORGE, AND LIE to me. Lie to my dog. Lie to my sister. But don't you ever lie to my kids. Deep into your State of the Siege lecture, long after sensible adults had turned off the tube or kicked in the screen, you came after our children. "By passing the No Child Left Behind Act," you said, "We are regularly testing every child ... and making sure they have better options when schools are not performing."

You said it ... and then that little tongue came out; that weird way you stick your tongue out between your lips like the little kid who knows he's fibbing. Like a snake licking a rat. I saw that snakey tongue dart out and I thought, "He knows."

And what you know, Mr. Bush, is this: You've ordered this testing to hunt down, identify and target for destruction the hopes of millions of children you find too expensive, too heavy a burden, to educate.

You know and I know the testing is a con. There is no "better option" at the other end. The cash for education went to eliminate the inheritance tax, that special program to give every million-

aire's son another million.

But, you'll tell me, you took tests as a youth. I know you did. And you scored on the Air Guard flight test 25 out of 100, one point above too dumb to fly. But you zoomed past the other would-be flyboys. They were stamped, "Ready for 'Nam."

And you took a test to get into Yale. And though your pet rock scored a wee bit higher than you, your grandpa on the Yale board provided the "better option" that got you in.

The ugly little irony is this: The core of No Child Left Behind is that struggling children will be left behind another year. And another year and another year.

You know and I know that this is not an educational opportunity program—because you offer no opportunities, no hope, no plan, no funding. Rather, it is the new Republican social Darwinism, educational eugenics: Identify the nation's loser-class early on. Trap them, then train them cheap.

No Child Left Behind is of one piece with the tax cuts for the rich, the energy laws for the insiders, the oil wars for the well-off. Someone has to care for the privileged. No society can have winners without lots and lots of losers.

And so we have No Child Left Behind—to provide the new worker drones that will clean the toilets at the Yale Alumni Club, punch the cash registers color-coded for illiterates, and pamper the winner-class on the higher floors of the new economic order. ■

GREG PALAST, author of *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*, has released a new CD, *Weapon of Mass Destruction*, available on www.GregPalast.com.



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False Crusader

By JIM WALLIS

IN HIS STATE OF THE Union speech, President Bush told U.S. troops: "America is proud of you. And my administration, and this Congress will give you the resources you need to fight and win the war on terror."

Several minutes later, he noted: "It's also important to strengthen our communities by unleashing the compassion of America's religious institutions. Religious charities of every creed are doing some of the most vital work in our country—mentoring children, feeding the hungry, taking the hand of the lonely." But he did not follow with: "And my administration, and this Congress, will give you the resources you need to fight and win the war on poverty."

The fact is that while religious charities are indeed playing a vital role, President Bush's policies are throwing people into the river much faster than we can pull them out. The effects of recession, war and tax cuts mean that 35 million Americans are living below the poverty line—3 mil-

lion more than when he took office. More than 12 million people have difficulty securing enough food, and 44 million lack health insurance. "Jobs are on the rise," he claimed. But an increase of 1,000 new jobs in December is not helping the 8.4 million people who are officially unemployed, or the 1.5 million who would like to work but have given up looking.

All across this country, hungry people are going without food stamps, poor children are going without healthcare, our elderly are going without medicine and school children are going without textbooks. Paying for war by cutting spending for the poor while giving tax cuts to the rich is morally unconscionable. The administration's priorities are a disaster for the poor and a windfall for the wealthiest. What we need is a faith-based initiative against political priorities that neglect people in poverty. ■

JIM WALLIS is editor-in-chief of *Sojourners*. For more go to www.sojo.net.

Weapon of Mass Distraction

By Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr.

President Bush used his State of the Union address as a weapon of mass distraction and ignored the actual imminent threats to our country. He cited our pre-emptive invasion and occupation of Iraq as a lesson that other nations have learned, but his words were a major distraction to the real moral lesson that Bush is teaching our children: "The end justifies the means."

At the same time, the president ignored the real and imminent threats to our country:

- Nearly 20 million Americans unemployed or underemployed and an official unemployment rate of 10.3 percent for African Americans.
- 44 million Americans with no health insurance and no plan to insure every American—with minorities comprising 52 percent of the nation's year-round uninsured population.
- A poverty rate now at 12 percent nationally and rising to nearly 25 percent in 2004 for African Americans.
- Under-funding by \$9 billion his own domestic priority—the No Child Left Behind Act—while using public dollars to fund vouchers to private and parochial schools that can discriminate.
- With no solution offered to the fiscal crisis that's confronting 45 of the 50 states that face deficits.

While President Bush wants to make "national security" his issue in the 2004 campaign—using fear to scare the American people into voting for him—we are still vulnerable because he is more concerned about giving no-bid contracts to his corporate friends than in adequately protecting our borders, providing enough money to inspect boats in our ports, fully equipping and training first responders, improving our domestic nuclear security and protecting our communities against bio-terrorist attacks. ■

JESSE JACKSON JR. represents Illinois' 2nd District.

Locker Room Politics

By SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

FINALLY, A PRESIDENT WITH THE guts to denounce that widespread, national scourge: Steroid use among professional athletes. Indeed, many of us wondered what exactly Bush was on as he delivered his testosterone-saturated, don't-mess-with-Texas vision of the country's role in the world. The *New York Times* headlines described Bush as "somber." Somber? With his incessant smirking, he looked exactly like a guy in the locker room who just flicked someone in the ass with a wet towel. The address was as much about the assertion of a particular brand of masculinity—bullying, homophobic, exultant in its domination over women, children and certain other men—as it was about public policy. "America will never seek a permission slip to defend our country," he taunted. Isn't it time for detention?

It is this cocky, frat boy stance combined with his bellicose foreign policies and punitive, fundamentalist-driven domestic agenda that should sound alarms for every woman in this country. The so-

This cocky, frat-boy stance
should sound alarms.

called "war on terror" has been and will be a fig leaf covering ongoing, major assaults on programs, existing or proposed, that attend to the needs of women, children and families in this country.

Feminism has been so effectively demonized that it is nearly unspeakable that

there might be a "feminist" take on the State of the Union. So here one is. Women should see this speech—its content and its strutting, performative style—not as another salvo in the war against terrorism, but as a roadmap, if you will, of Team Bush's undeclared and well-disguised war against women and girls. More money for "abstinence-only" programs (which studies show don't work)? Guess whose sexuality that is about—not the guys in the locker room. A constitutional amendment, for chrissakes, forbidding lesbians to marry? Unstated, of course, was his continuing assault on women's reproductive rights.

Despite Bush's defiant, macho assertions, the state of the union, from a woman's perspective, is terrible, and scary in what it portends for the future. Democrats and many commentators have pointed

Two Little Words

By Sandra Steingraber

It came as a two-word directive right after the remark about protecting American businesses from "needless federal regulation" and right before the one about the glories of free trade. It was embedded in the middle of a longish sentence that seemed to include an encoded message about drilling Alaska's wilderness for oil: "...so I urge you to pass legislation to modernize our electricity system, promote conservation, and make America less dependent on foreign sources of energy."

"Promote conservation": Bush's sole reference to the environment in the 2004 State of the Union address. One hundred eighty-two words about the imagined threats posed by gay marriage. (And what were those again?) Two words—sort of—about the real threats to our collective habitat.

Given that the state of the union is, in

some demonstrable ways, dependent on the state of the union's environment, a bit more commentary seems in order. How is our nation's air supply faring? What is the status of our drinking water? Our topsoil? How are the union's fish stocks holding up? Here are 182 words on the subject that an environmentally minded president might have said:

New research shows that small particulate matter, as from the burning of diesel fuel, is a dangerous threat to our health. Inhaling these particles contributes to asthma in our children, preterm labor in our pregnant mothers, and heart disease in our elders. We cannot afford this loss of human productivity. Moreover, our dependency on coal to generate energy not only fouls our air, but poisons our fish with mercury. Because of mercury contamination, sport-

caught fish are now unfit for consumption in many of the nation's states and mothers wonder how many tuna fish sandwiches they can safely feed their children.

This is unacceptable. At the same time, pesticides and fertilizers threaten our groundwater. There is no point in looking for water on Mars when our nation's own drinking water supplies are being poisoned by chemicals largely derived from barrels of foreign oil.

Tonight I call upon Congress to reform our environmental policies in ways that will end our 19th Century dependency on coal and oil. Let's invest in wind and solar power. Rebuild our public transportation system. Buy organic. Promote conservation. ■

Biologist **SANDRA STEINGRABER** is a visiting distinguished scholar at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York. Her most recent book is *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood*.

to what the speech refused to acknowledge. The United States invaded a country based on fabricated, self-serving charges with no weapons of mass destruction yet in sight. Team Bush succeeded in alienating—indeed, infuriating—millions around the globe. Forty-three million Americans have no health insurance. Since 2001, 2.3 million jobs have been lost. The Bush tax cuts have swelled the deficit and benefited the rich. Soldiers have been forced to stay in Iraq longer than they had hoped. Veterans are unable to get medical attention. (And a note of thanks to ABC, which kept cutting away to Teddy Kennedy, who rolled his eyes in disgust when Bush put forth whoppers, such as claiming to have given prescription drug coverage to seniors.)

In other words, top priorities for progressives include simply reversing the damage Team Bush has done by eliminating his tax cuts, dumping his multiple pro-corporate policies, getting rid of the Patriot Act and so forth. The repair work is so great that it hardly leaves room for proposing long overdue initiatives that would help those pesky special interest groups—women, children and families.

So, for just a minute, I'd like you to imagine another State of the Union speech. After a thorough reassessment of how the government is spending its money, and on whom, the president would note the persistent, unmet need for quality childcare in America and propose a national program of preschool care and education. He would strengthen, not undermine, Medicare, not only for "seniors," but also for the millions of now middle-age children who help care for them. There would be universal healthcare, period. Legislation on a par with the G.I. Bill would pour resources into the nation's public schools. The government would support paid maternity and paternity leave. How far down have we been beaten that all this, which feminists proposed in the '70s, now seems like the impossible dream?

If we are still far away from having a decent woman in the White House, then at least women should insist on a different kind of man, one who has, in fact, embraced feminism. While Howard Dean's Iowa whoop instantly served the media as a signifier of his entire character, Bush's persistently smirking swaggering performance did not. But the facial expressions, the body language and the rhetoric, not to mention the policies, announced loud and clear: I am a defiant, unreconstructed, sexist pig. Women of the nation, beware, and fight back. ■



BRIAN PAISLEY / BRIANPAISLEY@YAHOO.COM

Texas Testing Massacre

By Bill Ayers

Candidate Bush trumpeted the academic progress of students under a reform regime built on a single standardized test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. Not only were test-scores leaping upward but the "achievement gap" between students of color and their white counterparts was disappearing. This remarkable accomplishment was dubbed the "Texas Miracle," not merely an important piece of Bush's electoral strategy, but the phenomenon that catapulted Rod Paige, Houston's school superintendent, to the Bush cabinet as Secretary of Education.

But like so many of Bush's claims, the "Texas Miracle" turned out to be both extravagant and false. In June 2003 the Texas Education Agency discovered a pattern of rampant undercounting of dropouts, dramatic overestimations of college-bound graduates and falsified reports concerning crimes in schools. Test scores were inflated, successes wildly exaggerated, failure swept into the broom closet.

This is worth noting now because in his State of the Union message, President Bush vowed to stay the course: "We are regularly testing every child on the fundamentals," he exulted, highlighting the centerpiece of his signature education law: the No Child

Left Behind Act. He deemed his critics timid defenders of the status quo who favor "weakening standards and accountability" and announced that "the days of simply shuffling children along from grade to grade without them learning the basics" are over.

The tragedy is that the Bush policy distracts from a more hopeful path to genuine school improvement. If we are committed to free high-quality public schooling available to all we should campaign for a comprehensive program of change. Equity cannot be the goal. Equity must be the starting point.

It is no mystery why a high school in the suburbs that can raise \$15,000 per child on its tax base, and spends even more, does better than a high school on the South Side of Chicago that can raise only \$7,000 per child. The inequitable distribution of educational resources is a dagger at the heart of schooling in a democracy.

We don't need any more threats or punishments; we need support for teachers, families, students and communities in their efforts to set and meet high standards. With its high-stakes testing, No Child Left Behind functions more as an autopsy than a diagnostic. ■

BILL AYERS is the author of *Fugitive Days* and teaches at the University of Illinois, Chicago.



BY PAT AUFDERHEIDE

Sundance 2004

The Sundance Film Festival is part high school (did you get invited to the party?), part bazaar (check out high-fashion underwear, and drive the Tuareg!), and part dark-night-of-the-soul (freezing ankles while waiting for the bus).

Oh yeah, and then there's the movies.

The festival that started out to celebrate the creativity of independent film artists has become a never-failing source of irony—one of the world's most important film markets and, willy-nilly, the midwife of new Hollywood trends. And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Documentaries—less glamorous, more socially relevant, sometimes overtly political—were always the quieter side of Sundance. Not anymore. This year, Sundance opened with a splashy and historically insightful surfing doc, *Riding Giants* by Stacy Peralta, whose last hit was *Dogtown and Z-Boys*. Other documentarians with far less flashy fare captured the interest of the cell-phone brigades sent out by distributors.

Among the dozens of documentaries shown at Sundance, here are my faves. Most will end up on television and some will show up before that at a theater near you.

CONTROL ROOM A great entry into the What They Really Think of Us genre for the High Imperial Era. Jehane Noujaim, a Lebanese-Syrian-American who earlier directed the critically acclaimed *Startup.com*, spent the three months of the U.S. invasion of Iraq at the headquarters of Al-Jazeera, the independent Arab TV news channel in Qatar. Watch Al-Jazeera's resident intellectual, Hassan Ibrahim, face down U.S. Marine journalist-wrangler Josh Rushing. Catch the translator calmly interpret President Bush's pronouncement and then wrinkle his nose with distaste. And listen to senior producer Sameer Khader explain why showing civilian casualties sounds like journalism to him. This is great cinema verité, and it's a must-see for journalists. What was the hard part? "It was hard to see people who went to Al-Jazeera for freedom of speech and who expected U.S. support to be so disappointed," said Noujaim. "And U.S. bombing of their offices was a terrible moment."

LET THE CHURCH SAY

AMEN Here's one to make you revisit your prefab opinions of evangelical Christians. David Peterson spent a year with the members of a tiny storefront church in one of the most blasted-out corners of downtown Washington, D.C. For these African-Americans, the church provides the only social life, counseling and economic safety net they have. It's not only a poignant tale of mutual support, it's a damning condemnation of a government and society (there's a pointed clip of Bush near the end) that leaves it to a storefront ministry to meet whole lives' worth of needs. Peterson brought several members of the church to Sundance. "Several have never been on an airplane," he said. "It's such a joy that their story is told here."

SUPER SIZE ME Ever wonder what happens to people who eat at McDonald's all the time? Morgan Spurlock, a New Yorker in film production whose girlfriend is a vegan chef, decided to find out when he read about a lawsuit against McDonald's. The film goes with him across the country as he eats breakfast, lunch and dinner under the Golden Arches, and takes on the pounds and liver damage to prove it. Along the way he also takes on the entire fast-food industry, especially for its Pied Piper of children. It's Michael Moore-ish without the diffuse hostility. This was one of the hotter tickets at Sundance; Spurlock won best doc director, and cable channel A&E laid claim to it after a theatrical run. It should be shown in schools everywhere.

DEADLINE A great film for anyone working against the death penalty. Katy Chevigny and Kirsten Johnson follow the path toward the decision of plain-speaking former Illinois Gov. George Ryan to commute the sentences of 167 death-row inmates. Along the way, we

meet some wrongfully convicted men, freed not because of the legal system but because of journalism students' research at Northwestern University. Ryan showed up at the Sundance premiere, as did some of the wrongfully convicted. They reminded partygoers that they can support anti-death penalty work by going to deadlinethe-movie.com and clicking "take action," and so can you.

HEIR TO AN EXECUTION

A far more personal take on the death penalty, and possibly the last word on the Rosenberg executions. Granddaughter Ivy Meeropol, with investment from HBO (where the film will end up), explores her grandparents' story. The issue is no longer guilt or innocence. Her family accepts that Julius conducted industrial espionage but did not commit the crime for which he was executed, and Ethel was innocent. She instead sets out to understand why Julius and Ethel accepted execution and the context of the terrible event. The star of the film is her father, the charismatic and loving Michael Meeropol, who can still recall the horrifying events of his early youth moment-by-moment.

FARMINGVILLE Another cinema verité triumph, taking us inside an America all around us that we don't usually look at. Carlos Sandoval and Catherine Tambini spent three years in a small working-class town in Long Island, where mostly illegal Mexicans have been congregating to take the jobs Americans won't do in Long Island's wealthier towns. They chronicle the rise of a mostly white, anti-immigrant movement that erupts into hate crimes and chart how local governments and organizations struggle to resolve the conflict. The film, funded by a special public TV fund to foster diversity, won a special jury prize, and will air on public TV's leading series

for independent work, P.O.V. later this year. (So will another Sundance film funded by public TV's Independent Television Service, *Chisholm '72 Unbought and Unbossed*, an important slice of election history.)

International documentaries have usually taken a back seat at Sundance, but coprogrammer Diane Weyermann, a lawyer who used to head the human rights-oriented Soros Documentary Fund, is changing that. This year a clutch of remarkable films provided small but important windows into vast realities beyond our borders. My favorites included:

DISBELIEF Who really set the bombs that blew up an entire Moscow apartment complex, and with it a young woman's mother and boyfriend? St.Petersburg-based filmmaker Andrei Nekrasov is pretty sure he's found the people who know the answer. They charge that President Putin's government has created horrific terrorist incidents and blamed them on Chechen

nationalists, in order to create support for its unpopular leadership. The gripping film features the young woman and her sister, married to a Wisconsin man.

"We searched for a U.S. character because we wanted to win international attention for this issue," Nekrasov said. "Governments can too easily use terrorism as a weapon to intimidate their own publics. An undemocratic country is now a threat to the entire world."

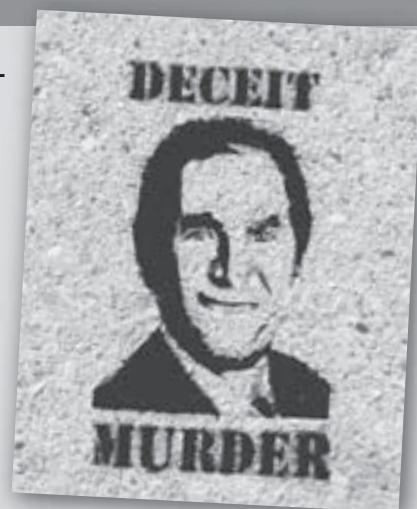
SCREAMING MEN In a rare upbeat offering, Mika Ronkainen gives us an insider's look at an astonishing Finnish Screaming Men's Choir. Led by the fanatical Petri Serviö, who invented it, choir members dress like Agent Smith (of the Matrix) and strut to their places robotically, at which time they holler, chant and scream national anthems and folk songs in unison. They say it's very cathartic. It's also popular worldwide. It's true: Life is strange. Ronkainen told me he thinks it gets even stranger north of Helsinki. ■

ART SPACE

Artist **CHARLES ANGELL** began stenciling "Deceit/Murder" on sidewalks in his Chicago neighborhood in 2002 while Bush was still agitating for a war in Iraq.

"I've never believed in America's facade of benevolence," Angell says, "but the political, economic and cultural environment has taken this lie to a nearly surreal extent. And to examine the cause points to our addiction to consumer society. So, lately I've been trying to come up with anti-corporate and anti-consumer stencils."

Angell also works with Inner City Light, a program that provides cameras and photo training to kids in public housing (5th through 7th grades) to encourage them to explore and reflect their environment.



BY DON THRASHER

Outside the Mainstream

In an age where floundering major label executives sponsor high-priced think tanks on CD pricing structures and mount public campaigns decrying

the evils of downloaded music, Chicago-based music entrepreneur Rich Seng has devised a revolutionary method for distributing his products. As unrealistic as it sounds, Seng has produced a string of free compilation CDs and a DVD collection available on his website www.sengbrothers.com. He funds his compilations by selling ads on the CD jacket.

Seng so far has produced a

series of Windy City CDs and collections of regional music. Recent projects include an indie rock compilation featuring acts such as The Shams, Baseball Furies, The Cells and Light FM, and Music of Ohio, featuring unsigned bands from Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Toledo. While most of Seng's musical projects have concentrated on rock bands, he plans to release his

first all-rap album in March.

"I'm working on Music of California and I did Music of Texas a while ago," says Seng. "I'm planning on doing the same thing in Indiana and Michigan. I'm trying to build an underground media network of free CDs and DVDs. That's my vision."

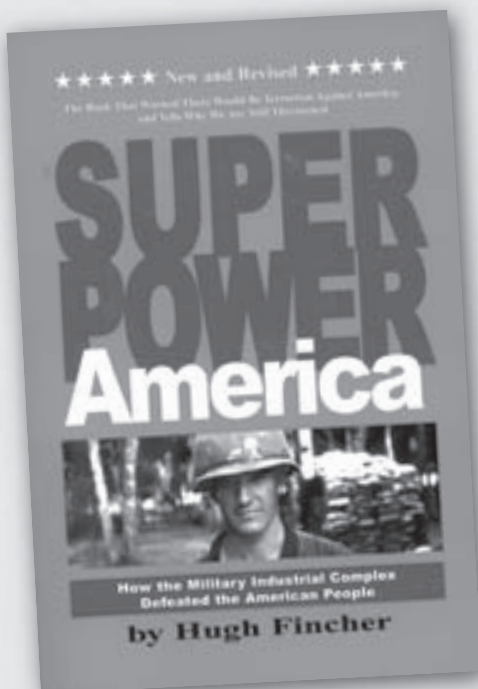
Seng's first multimedia release, the 133-minute DVD *Cherry Bomb*, was released in late September and contains experimen-

tal shorts, music videos, mini-documentaries, comedic sketches and animation by Chicago-based filmmakers. The content of the films ranges from the silly (Doug Lussenhop's "Ice Cold Homies") to the poignant ("Algren's Last Night" by Warren Leming and Carmine Cervi), and the work ranges in length from less than a minute (the experimental "Inflation" by Casandra Voltolina) to more than 10 minutes (Nathan Pommer's surrealistic sci-fi comedy "P-13"). *Cherry Bomb* also offers such interactive extras as a splash screen with artist bios, contact information, Web site hyperlinks and more.

Seng's free CD and DVD concept is a cost-effective way to get the work of talented and under-funded underground bands and filmmakers into the hands of consumers looking for entertainment outside the mainstream. ■

DON THRASHER, a former member of Guided By Voices, is a writer and musician based in Dayton, Ohio.

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Do you really believe our Commander-in-Chief when he says he received no warning at all of the threat of terrorist attacks before Sept. 11, 2001? In view of the well-known and frequent attacks, ever since the days of Reagan, on our troops barracks and embassies overseas, as well as the first one on the World Trade Center, isn't it more accurate to say he was asleep at his post? Isn't it also true that he and the majority of the American people are still asleep because they let him redirect public outrage from the terrorists—outlaws armed only with pocket knives—who had attacked us to a nation that had not?

Two-thirds of our taxes are spent for troops and weapons to protect us... not from terrorists... but from powerful military enemies that don't exist. This brings profit to corporations and power to politicians. Both political parties enforce a taboo to "keep national defense out of politics" to help conceal the theft. Also, remembering how the truth about war caused the American people to stop the one in Vietnam, the mass media no longer reports the whole truth about the suffering. This is in the nation Thomas Jefferson helped found with such immortal words as "I HAVE SWORN ON THE ALTER OF ALMIGHTY GOD ETERNAL ENMITY AGAINST EVERY FORM OF TYRANNY OVER THE MIND OF MAN."

The author, Hugh Fincher, is a former GI who, at the end of World War II, was ordered to promote two wars in Asia instead of being sent home. Later, he learned about terrorism firsthand while living in Saigon as a USAID Foreign Service Officer, watching a war he had unwittingly help start many years before. Saigon was attacked by terrorists almost daily, most notably during the Tet Offensive in 1968 when 10,000 of them tried to conquer the city. The city was saved not by the military, but by the national police. Similarly, in the September 11 terrorism, it was police and firefighters who prevented a far worse tragedy. All the awesome weapons of Superpower America could not protect more than 3,000 fellow Americans. You can't fight terrorism with its cause—militarism!

Although the author Hugh Fincher is unknown, this book has been endorsed by: Dr. Oscar Arias, Nobel Peace Prize winner; Norman Cousins, author of "The Pathology of Power"; Senator Dale Bumpers, Center for Defense Information; and Pete Seeger, who helped stop a war with song.

The book can be ordered from Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble.com or most bookstores.



BY JAMES PARKER

Pan-tastic

What the hell? That P.J. Hogan's splendid *Peter Pan* appears to be vanishing, unicorn-like, from our malls and multiplexes, having recouped but a portion of its

fantastical cost—that over the holiday season it basically tanked—is certainly a sorry symptom of something.

But what?

A mass failure of taste? Or has the movie-going public, long preyed upon by phantasmal focus groups, finally and conclusively fragmented into demographic shards, slivers of population each with its own needs and jargon?

What cannot be categorized will die a sure death at the box office, and Hogan's version of J.M. Barrie's masterpiece is—looked at in a certain dim way—un-niched, unmarketable. This is no *Shrek* or *Monsters Inc.*, doping out the kiddies while lobbing over the odd smirk for their adult guardians. Hogan, condescending to no one, allows the full wattage of the original to shine though, in all the richness of its high language and the strangeness of its conceits. The men who green-lighted him must be wringing their hands.

Peter Pan

Directed by P.J. Hogan

In Barrie's *Peter Pan*—first staged in 1904, novelized (by Barrie himself) in 1911 and filmed uncertainly ever since—we recognize within seconds the hallmarks of the authentic children's classic. We get the sense, simultaneously, of a superabundance of energy and an almost ruthless economy of theme: "All children, except one, grow up."

There it is, the beginning and the end of it, and all an able filmmaker has to do is let it pass unmanipulated through his hands.

Hogan does this, but he also does some exquisite work of his own. Barrie wrote that a good story should not be "large and sprawly, you know, with a tedious distance between one adventure and another, but nicely crammed." And in the pacing and layering of his narrative Hogan captures this

perfectly. Scene by scene we feel Barrie's unblinking piling-on of weirdness, the dreamlike compression of events and surplus vividness produced around Neverland.

Hogan also gets some excellent performances. Jeremy Sumpter as Peter is as bright and heartless and defensively brash as Barrie could have wished. If there is a tinniness to his performance it is the tinniness of Peter's own shallow nature. He has the stinging humors of an Ariel, spurning adulthood as Ariel in Shakespeare's *Tempest* spurned her mistress Sycorax. Ariel was confined to a cloven pine, but Peter is at his godless liberty, flying high and crowing of his own cleverness.

In his first draft of the play, Barrie had no Hook at all: Peter himself was the villain, a "demon boy" swooping in the sashed windows. All the necessary badness, the necessary spite, was in Peter, and Hook was mere stagecraft.

So Jason Isaacs plays the pirate in all his fatal superfluity, as a sort of depleted rock star, drained and sighing, testing the edge of his hook with an almost-numb fingertip. He seems to lack life, to have been brought into being at the cruel whim of the child-god, for sport. His galleon and crew are icebound off the shore of Neverland, in suspended animation as it were, until Peter returns from London, at which point Hook resumes his role as the jaded sponsor of Peter's buccaneer dreams.

Isaacs, following convention, also plays Mr. Darling, father to Wendy, Michael and John. Oh the awful halfness of Mr. Darling, that cripple of adulthood! We see him at home, outnumbered, where the chandeliers tremble to the pounding of little feet. We see him at work, at the bank, shrinking before the god-

like board of directors, with its galaxy of white whiskers. "I must become a man that children fear and adults respect!" he cries out. And then comes his ghastly moment of self-assertion: White-faced and brittle, he casts the dog/nurse Nana out into the cold. (This is the trigger incident that sends his children through the window with Peter.)

Rachel Hurd-Wood plays Wendy, and she is dead-on: lustrous, toothy, flowingly night-gowned and gravely excited by violence. Peter may have his Ariel moods, but it is Wendy who is Barrie's Prospero: Her nursery stories cast the spell, lifting her listeners into the dreamstate, and it is she who takes the decision to return from Neverland to gently conduct her brothers back to an enriched and clarified reality.

All together now: One ... two ... three ... "Will you be my mother?" ■

JAMES PARKER is a writer based in New York and regularly writes about film for *In These Times*.



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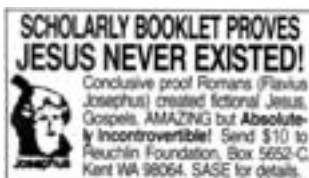
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BUSH BY THE NUMBERS*



- 232: Number of American combat deaths in Iraq between May 2003 and January 2004
- 501: Number of American servicemen and women to die in Iraq from the beginning of the war—so far
- 29,000: Number of American troops to have been killed, wounded, injured or become so ill as to require evacuation from Iraq
- 0: Number of American combat deaths in Germany after the Nazi surrender to the Allies in May 1945
- 0: Number of coffins of dead soldiers that the Bush administration has allowed to be photographed
- 0: Number of funerals or memorials that President Bush has attended for soldiers killed in Iraq
- 100: Number of fund-raisers attended by Bush or Vice President Dick Cheney in 2003
- 10: Number of solo press conferences that Bush has held since beginning his term
- 10 million: Estimated number of people worldwide who took to the streets in opposition to the invasion of Iraq
- 9.2: Average number of American soldiers wounded in Iraq each day since the invasion in March last year
- 1.6: Average number of American soldiers killed in Iraq per day since hostilities began
- 16,000: Approximate number of Iraqis killed since the start of war
- 10,000: Approximate number of Iraqi civilians killed since the beginning of the conflict
- 32%: Percentage of the bombs dropped on Iraq this year that were not precision-guided
- 1983: The year in which Donald Rumsfeld gave Saddam Hussein a pair of golden spurs
- \$100 billion: Estimated cost of the war in Iraq to American citizens by the end of 2003
- \$127 billion: Amount of U.S. budget surplus in 2001, the year Bush became president
- \$374 billion: Amount of U.S. budget deficit in the fiscal year for 2003
- #1: Rank of this year's deficit—on course to be the biggest in U.S. history
- \$23,920: Amount of each U.S. citizen's share of the national debt as of January 19
- 28: Number of days that Bush took off last August, the second longest holiday of any president in history, after Richard Nixon
- 13: Number of vacation days the average American worker receives each year
- +6%: Percentage change since 2001 in the number of U.S. families in poverty
- \$300 million: Amount cut from the federal program that provides subsidies to poor families to heat their homes
- \$10.9 million: Average wealth of the members of Bush's original 16-person cabinet
- \$42,228: Median household income in the U.S. in 2001

**AS REPORTED IN THE INDEPENDENT OF LONDON ON JANUARY 20, 2004*

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